

SCIENCE FICTION

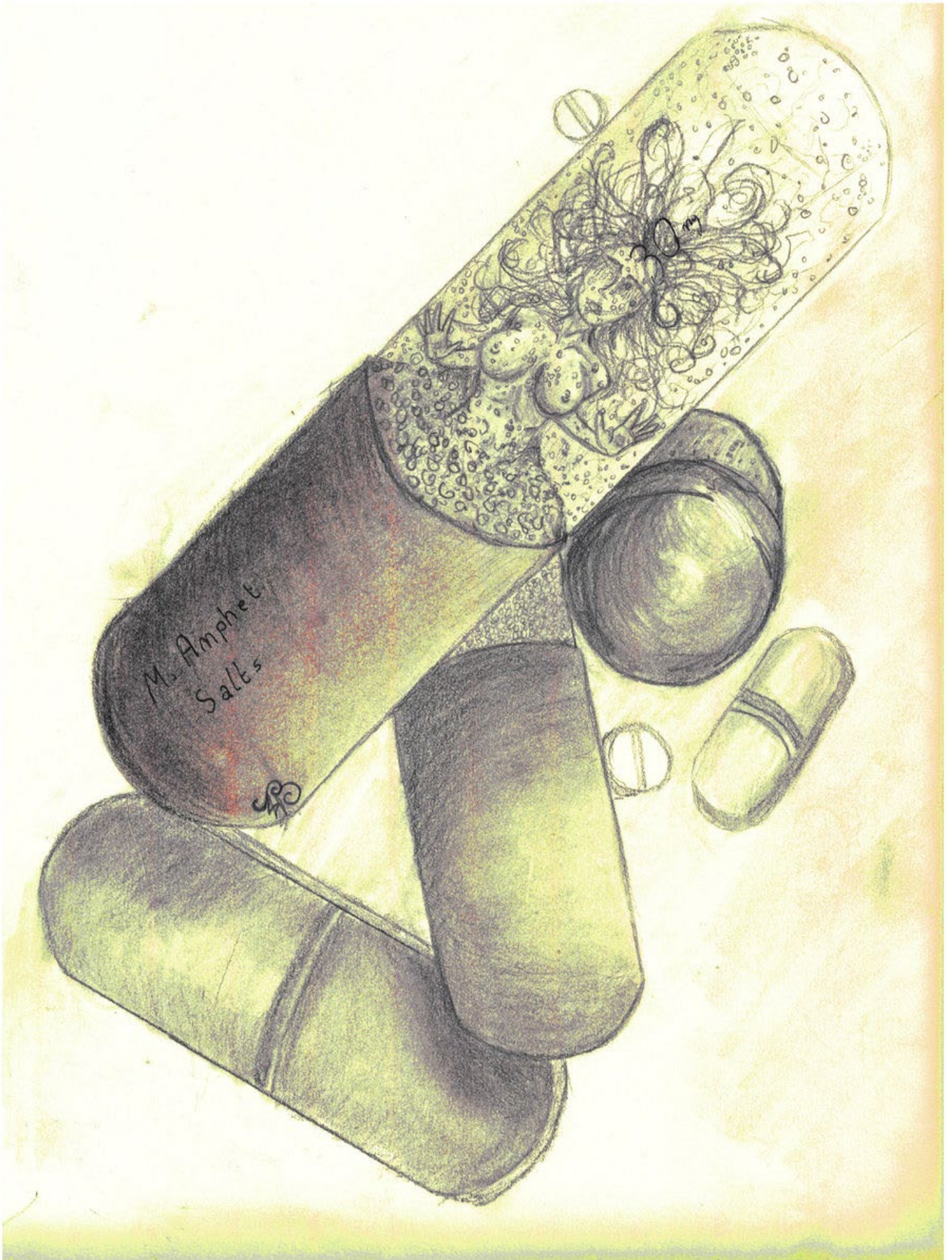
ISSUE 7: CYBERPUNK



TABLE OF CONTENTS

BANG BY TINA RUTHERFORD.....	5
FIRE BY TINA RUTHERFORD.....	7
SUBMISSION BY TINA RUTHERFORD.....	8
DREAMS BY E.S. WYNN.....	11
NARCOTIC NURSE & THE DEVIANTS OF THE FUTURE.....	16
VERILIS (ONE) BY BRITTANY WARREN.....	23
DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION, A REVIEW BY COURTNEY ALSOP.....	25
LIFE RAGE, A REVIEW BY COURTNEY ALSOP.....	29
SACKS BY M. ALLEN.....	33
FEVER DREAMS BY ADRIA WEST.....	37
CATALYST BY ADRIA WEST.....	38
A THERAPY SESSION/INTERVIEW WITH JEREMY C. SHIPP...41	
SEX ADVICE WITH SEAN M. THOMPSON.....	45
ART BY RAE VENA.....	54
THE ENTOMOLOGIST BY ADRIA WEST.....	57

POETRY BY JAANI ANDROPHILE.....	58
ZOMBIE TRAMP BY DAN MENDOZA.....	59
SYSTEM CRASH BY ASHE ARMSTRONG.....	65
HOW TO FEED DEPRESSION.....	68
HACKED BY JAMES MURRAY.....	80
WHO YOU ARE (FOR JESSICA) BY BRYAN HOWIE.....	85
THE WORLD OF CYBERPUNK.....	92
GLOBAL ILLUMINATION BY VAS.....	99
POSTLAND COMIC.....	102
THE TOP 10 SCI-FI MOVIES OF ALL TIME BY MIZ DESHANNON.....	113
THE AFTERLIFE MIXER BY DWG.....	117
TRANSMITTED LIFE BY STEPHANIE ACEVADO.....	121
THE NURSERY BY NICK KIMBRO.....	123
THE 5TH OF JULY BY A.A. GARRISON.....	127
THE EVIL THAT MEN DO: PART 6.....	133
DARK DAYS BY DILUCUL.....	141
SPECIAL THANKS AND CREDITS.....	145



BANG

BY TIANA RUTHERFORD

How does it feel?

To kiss and caress the beautiful steel

To slip your tongue up the shaft quickly

Rubbing your hands across the barrel oh so romantically

Your body ready to hear the aroused click

As it massages your lip

Bubbling up the hidden desires

And putting them out like wild fires

It's coldness draws you in

It feels no compassion

It helps erase all sin

It cares nothing for the sensual touch of strangers.

It can go multiple rounds

And always, releases with a sound.

Servicing others near and far.

Just keep your mouth slightly ajar

Let it sliiiiide in

Pull the trigger

And let the fun begin.



FIRE

BY TIANA RUTHERFORD

Watch the flames as they burn

Light the match, that's how you learn

Light me up you know I like it

Let the flames spread, you can't fight it

Help me grow and help me spread

Let's start this fire up in the bed

Heat up and set the world on fire

I love the way you're a liar

It makes the flames go higher

It hurts and its burns!

But we love all the more

This pain, this hurt. Who do we do this for?

This burning flame, do we do it for the money or joy?

This pain, do we love it because it makes us its toy?

Blisters on my skins

Burns on my feet

This pain it can last for years

Or maybe just weeks

I would do it all again, just to feel the heat

Whip at me and around me

You always could see

How much the burning hurt me

But you always pulled me out of the rain

Because you always knew how to light my flame

SUBMISSION

BY TIANA RUTHERFORD

It's never a sudden change

Even his voice stayed in the same range

The whole hearted sound of trust

Masking the pulsating, throbbing lust

From there you begin to slide

And the submissive is hard to hide

Every selfish human inkling of pride

Has slowly left your side.

Once the trust is there and the pride is gone

That's when everything goes wrong

The trust is still there but safety is gone

You fall farther down the slippery slope

Until you finally see yourself bound with rope

Hands tied behind you

Head down, as he looks through

You realize there is nothing you can do

Except do as he please

And listen as he says

"Get On Your Knees"





DREAMS E.S. WYNN

Cars, dozens of them. Dozens of cars blurred by racing winds as they hurtled through the air at breakneck speeds. It was a mosaic of a thousand colors and shapes accented by a cacophony of harsh sound that echoed across miles of concrete and darkened the sky with a tapestry born of destruction as vehicles were picked up and flung in a dozen different directions. A blue, sport-utility vehicle lanced through the cloud of plastic and aluminum, darting hundreds of feet straight up in the air while several passenger cars, a silver, full-size van and a taxi cab were tossed forcefully aside, crumpling into wads of colorful metal and plastics as they were dashed against the sleek, glassy faces of skyscrapers that towered on either side of the wide street. Glittering chunks of metal –aluminum, steel, titanium– littered the streets, spotting the open patches of asphalt with glittering fields of debris that stretched between ragged hunks of plastic and the shattered hulks of automobiles.

It was as if a full-force tornado, indeed the very mother of all tornadoes had suddenly set down in the middle of a four-lane, three-way intersection in the busiest part of Los Angeles and had anchored itself at the feet of a young woman who stood with her arms crossed and an indignant look fixed solidly on her face. She seemed completely out of place there, with the gale-force winds whirling around her, untouched and unconcerned; even her thick mane of waist-length midnight-black hair stayed absolutely still within the howling confines of the tornado.

Then, just as quickly as it had appeared, the great twisting cone of wind slipped back into the clouds and the street was left completely silent but for the sound of a distant bleating car alarm and the steady tink-tink of tiny bits of falling debris.

With a deep, relaxing breath, she let her arms fall to her sides and took a slow, steady step forward. Cool, sudden gusts of air played along stretches of exposed skin not covered by her only garb –a thin, blue medical gown– as she walked through the destruction around her to the other side of the debris field. Bits of broken glass and fragments of concrete crunched beneath her feet, digging into the tender flesh of her soles, but she kept walking, seemingly unaware. The car alarm faded into the distance as she stepped onto the clear, warm asphalt on the other side of the wreckage and stood placidly, looking up at the gloomy sky with one hand wrapped modestly around her waist.

The city was empty as far as she could see; everyone had been evacuated and every road in or out for miles around had been barricaded when she had awoken. It hadn't taken her long, or much effort for that matter, to dispose of the scientists who had been keeping her captive, studying her brain while she slept, all but left in a deep coma as they poked and prodded her body, trying to understand the powers she had. Yes, powers; that is what everyone had always referred to her abilities as; the first doctor that had observed her powers even managed to win an award, and was practically hailed as a legend in the scientific community for his work on a paper that elegantly documented some of the finest nuances of something she did so naturally. He clearly explained her ability to draw raw energy from a plethora of different sources, regardless of whether they were manmade or naturally occurring, –providing that they were within range– and focus them through her mind to create such things as tornadoes or a superheated pocket of air on a whim. To them, to the scientists, to her own mother, these powers had been a gift, a frightening, dangerous gift that they were determined to control or repress, and it had been their methods, their own twisted curiosities, that had cost her any chance she might have had to lead a normal life. The only life they hadn't stripped from her was a life of hate and sorrow; necessity had crushed her fear as well as her compassion, leaving only a cold, raw, burning anger to simmer within her chest. To her, the

only viable path left was revenge.

Her hair stirred of its own accord and harsh flame flared across the length of her shoulders for a split second as raw hatred boiled through her mind, shattering the calm that had preceded it. The ground trembled beneath her soft steps, and tiny cracks leapt across the asphalt before her calm reasserted itself. She could blame everyone, had blamed everyone, but in the end, it all came back to her and her powers.

But it had been her mother who had noticed her talents; it had been doctor Zawilla who had conducted the tests, written the paper, and it had been a countless number of scientists who had worked to force her into a dream-like state for so long.

The scientists had thought that she could not harm them while she slept. They had thought that she could not draw upon or focus energy, much less think while she was locked in their artificial coma, but they had been wrong.

A smile tugged at the corners of her mouth as she continued to walk down the abandoned street. They had been wrong, so very wrong, and their failure had cost all of them their lives.

But their failure to contain her had stemmed from overlooking a seemingly innocent thing: dreams. The scientists had not known nor cared if she dreamt while they kept her unconscious; they hadn't seen dreaming for what it would eventually become: the only loophole in their otherwise perfect system.

It was a small loophole, so small that its true value had eluded even her for a long while. The first dreams to come to her in the artificial coma had been like any other; ways for her mind to keep busy, providing a series of twisted little movies while she waited, forced to watch things happen to her, to her childhood friends, her father and relatives long dead. The dreams worsened, getting steadily more violent and more frightening until she finally learned how to fight back and take control of them. The first time was a momentous achievement. One minute she was cowering in a dark corner with a tall, sinuous figure of shadows and twisted bone staring hungrily at her; the next, she was on her feet, a stout pipe in her hands, swinging quickly enough that the figure was dropped with a single crushing blow.

That moment had opened the world of dreams to her. From then on, she had experienced a continuous dream within her coma, a dream where she knew no bounds. She flew, hunted down those who had been her hunters before, and made a safe, prosperous life for herself within her sleeping mind, but it hadn't been enough. The people weren't real, her revenge had no bearing on the real world, and every time she felt love within the Dream, it was a hollow fantasy.

She quickly became aware and cognizant within the Dream; the landscape changed of its own accord less often, she was no longer subject to the tired whims of her mind, and she found herself drawn to the very end of the Dream where the subconscious reality dwindled to a point, stretching conically outward like the base of a balloon and knotted to contain her mental reality by some unseen force. It wasn't the cone of stretched reality that intrigued her; however, it was what lay at the very center: a tiny, black rubber plug. No bigger than her thumb, the little rubber stopper plugged the only hole in her reality and colors surged around it, trying to get through to whatever lay beyond. Several times she found herself reaching for it, reaching for the little golden chain that hung from the back of the plug, only to jerk her hand back at the last moment. There was a yearning to pull that plug, to yank it from its socket and let reality deflate, but she did not want to risk death. Not here, not in the Dream.

And so, time passed, several eons it seemed, or perhaps only a fleeting moment, spent flying, sorting through and absently trying to organize the endless stacks of papers that represented her memories in the stuffy office of her brain and resting, staring at the little plug, daring herself over and over again, to grab the frail little chain and pull. Just one little tug, she told herself, just one little tug on that little golden chain and it can all be over, ending either in death or awakening. Every time, the same response echoed back from somewhere behind her in the depths of the Dream. "A fifty-percent chance isn't worth risking your life. Wait a little longer. . ."

Then, suddenly, she stood up, leaving the little dead patch of dirt where she had lain, allowing the grass to grow, die back, and sprout again around her while she had stared at the plug. She had come to a decision. She had no idea how much time had passed in the waking world, hours, days, years, decades, but one thing was perfectly clear; Whatever happened when she pulled the plug, it would be better than being trapped here, in the prison of her own mind, unable to exact revenge, unable to prove her worth to the world, unable to love, and be loved.

Gently, she dusted off her soft, denim clothing –as new as it had been the day she had begun to dream– and reached for the plug.

As her hand touched the chain a cold shiver worked itself through her, followed closely by a dark whisper that seemed to grip her heart with icy talons as it murmured: “This is the end. There is no going back.”

She nodded then, more for herself than the voice, and pulled, yanking the little stopper out of the hole. It took only a fraction of a second for the Dream to deflate, roaring through the steadily widening hole with a flurry of bright colors and a deafening cacophony of sound that sucked her into the hungry blackness with it.

She clearly remembered waking.

Her eyes snapped open and she found herself staring into the terrified, yet clear blue eyes of a man whose frightened shout was muffled by the surgical mask he wore. One thought, a quick whim fulfilled, and the doctor was sent sprawling, a spray of crimson staining the outside of her thick-walled, transparent prison. Several others rushed toward her in an attempt to sedate her again, but a carefully placed pocket of superheated air had turned them to ash even before they even had a chance to get near her.

The prison, a transparent box constructed of a plastic relative that refused to crack or buckle under the impact of anything less than a thirty-millimeter cannon, proved to be a minimal obstacle. A molecule-thin needle of energy slipped into the material and made a slow circle in the face of the rectangular prison, carving a hole large enough for her to escape. Somewhere nearby, an alarm sounded, but she paid little, if any attention at all to it. It was not at all surprising that someone had discovered she had regained consciousness and exacted revenge on the scientists who had been unlucky enough to have been assigned this particular shift. The blaring klaxon only meant that national security had been apprized of the situation. A smile had come to her lips at that thought. She had dealt with national security before and walked away unscathed; what hope did they have of doing any better this time around?

Blaring sirens brought her mind back to the present. Thin dust-devils lifted from the street and stirred fitfully around her as six glossy black sedans and eight two-tone patrol cars roared in from three different directions at the next intersection, still less than a block away. They slid into place with a squeal of brakes and a flurry of red and blue lights, effectively blocking the road before her. These officers were well trained; it took only a few seconds for every one of them to take cover behind a car door and draw a bead on her with their assault rifles. Dozens of red dots darted across her chest, legs, and face, but she smiled back defiantly.

“All-right miss Laskosky, that’s far enough.” One of the officers had a megaphone. Her smile widened. How refreshing, they actually had the courage to be polite. The last group of law enforcement officers she had remembered encountering long ago, before she had been forced into an artificial coma, had not been so considerate. “If you don’t stop now, we will have no choice but to open fire!”

She continued to walk toward them, keeping a steady pace and a playful grin as she padded across the asphalt.

“Freeze!” He yelled. “I order you to stop!”

There was fear in his voice. He knew how perilous this was and yet he did not flee. She respected him for that. There were not enough men in law enforcement who were capable of staring certain death in the eye, much less standing directly in its path, knowing full well what the consequences would be.

"You have three seconds!" his voice echoed along the sheer faces of the surrounding skyscrapers. Three seconds was more than enough time. "Two!" he yelled. "One!"

She thrust her arms forward as a cacophony of gunfire drowned out the officer's order to fire and smiled as every bullet flew wide, redirected by a thousand tiny manipulations of the air. The gunfire stopped abruptly when the projectiles slipped into a band of superheated air, manifested just behind her, and exploded into a silvery sheet of molten lead that shimmered as it splashed across the road, melting into the pavement with a series of loud pops and hisses.

There was silence for a moment; the officers stared at her over their assault rifles in awestruck fear as a maddening grin stretched across her face. More than one dropped his gun and ran, only to be scooped up by powerful gusts of wind and dashed against a building several stories off the ground. The examples she made of the cowards were short and violent, but it kept the others rooted to where they stood.

A silent moment passed before the man with the megaphone finally regained his nerve. As he raised the thing to issue another order to fire, a lanky, gaunt-faced man dressed entirely in white with a short puff of pale-silver hair strode up beside him and, giving the officer a few rough words, promptly ripped the megaphone out of his hands.

"Rhea!" He shouted.

She froze in mid-step and the grin vanished. It didn't seem possible. He was the last person she had expected to see here.

"Father?" She whispered, then yelled: "Daniel!?"

"That's right Rhea." He affirmed. There was a trace of anger in his voice, but he hid it well and managed to keep a relatively level tone. "I think you've made a big enough mess, don't you?"

She nodded and mouthed a silent "yes." Daniel had been the closest thing she had ever had to a father, the only human that had actually tried to show compassion, and the only person who had ever been able to help her forget, even if just for a split second, that she was not normal.

"Now," He began shakily, "come on, let's go home."

"No," she said quietly, then shouted: "No! I won't let them experiment on me anymore, father!"

"You're coming back, Rhea." Daniel's tone was hard, cold, and direct to a degree that it made steel seem delicate in comparison. "I don't want to have to take you by force."

"What are you going to do?" she laughed, "sedate me?" The traces of a dangerous grin played across her lips as she pulled back her sleeve and held out an arm mockingly. "I'm right here father. I dare you to try and stick me with a needle. Your threats are empty, meaningless! I'm not going back."

There was silence for a moment and, when Daniel finally did respond, there was a trace of fear in his voice. "I won't try to sedate you, Rhea, but I don't want to have to use desperate measures—" She cut him off, shouting: "You're bluffing, old man!" The air shimmered wildly around her and her hair began to twist and writhe like a thousand ebony vipers. "Don't try to stop me! I will be free!"

Daniel watched her carefully. His face had become a stolid block and the fear that had tainted his voice a moment ago had all but evaporated.

Slowly, he raised the megaphone.

"Rhea," he paused, and the break seemed to stretch on for a silent eternity. "I'm sorry."

There was a quiet pop, just loud enough that the faintest echo of it reached Rhea's ears as a short dart hit her,

the needle-tip biting deep into her shoulder and ripping through muscle before blasting a cold liquid into her flesh. She screamed, more out of shock and fear than pain, and turned a hateful stare on the source of the little barb.

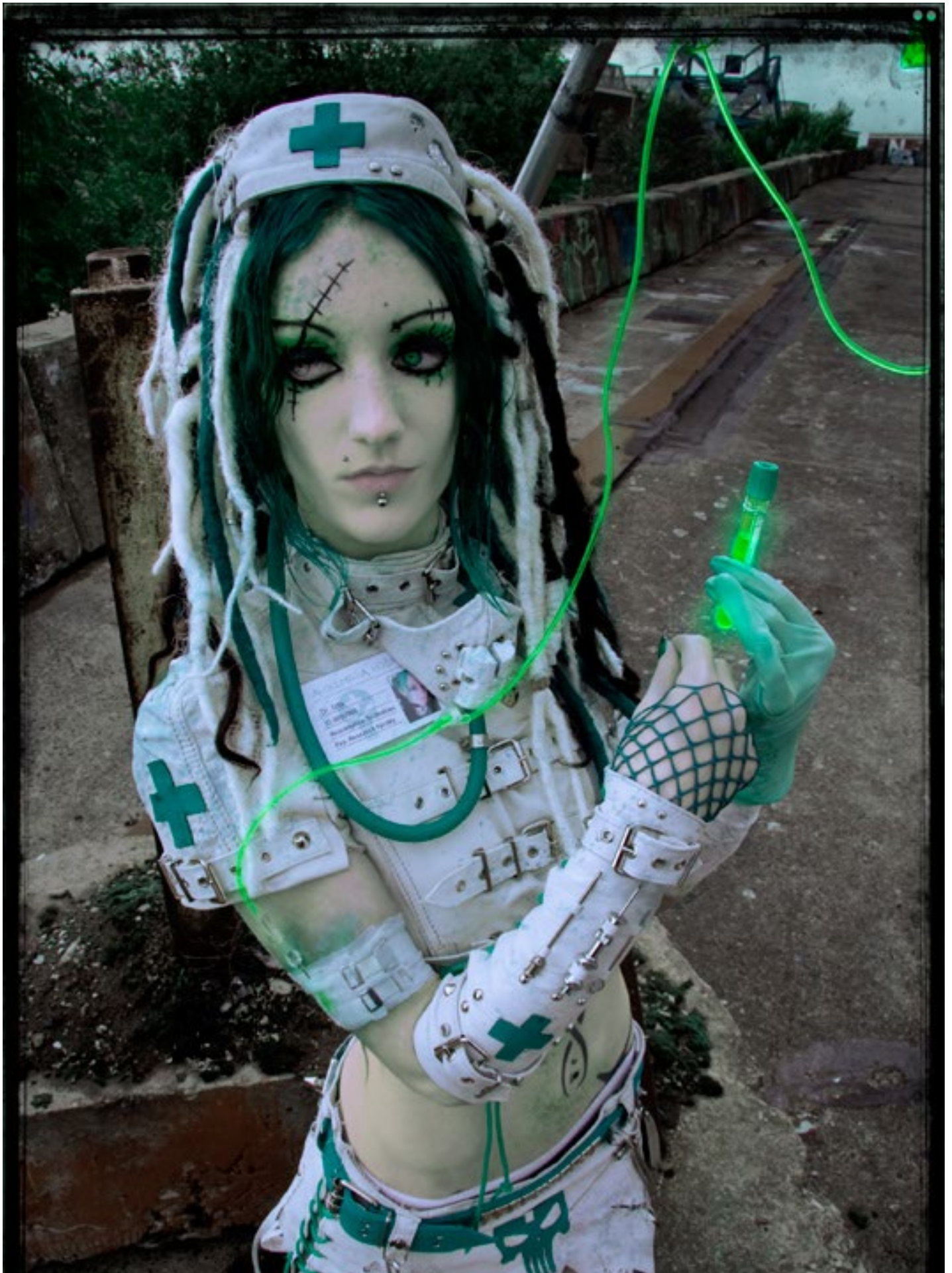
A wide section of skyscraper, nearly ten stories up and off to her right, exploded in a flurry of shattered glass, ragged bits of steel, and wide chunks of cracked concrete. Her vision blurred and she stumbled, but she continued to stare up at the massive hole she had blasted in the side of the building. Her expression softened and the hatred in her eyes waned as the chemicals in the needle began to take effect, numbing her entire body as they shot through her veins, spurred on by a heart still beating strong despite the sedative nature of the drug. There was a trace of movement from the gaping wound in the face of the building. She tried to set her jaw resolutely; she had not killed the sniper, and it irked her.

The dark silhouette of the sniper slipped to the edge of the ragged opening and stared back down at her, long, bulky rifle still in hand. Daniel said something into the radio of a nearby squad car, and the officers had begun to set down their rifles.

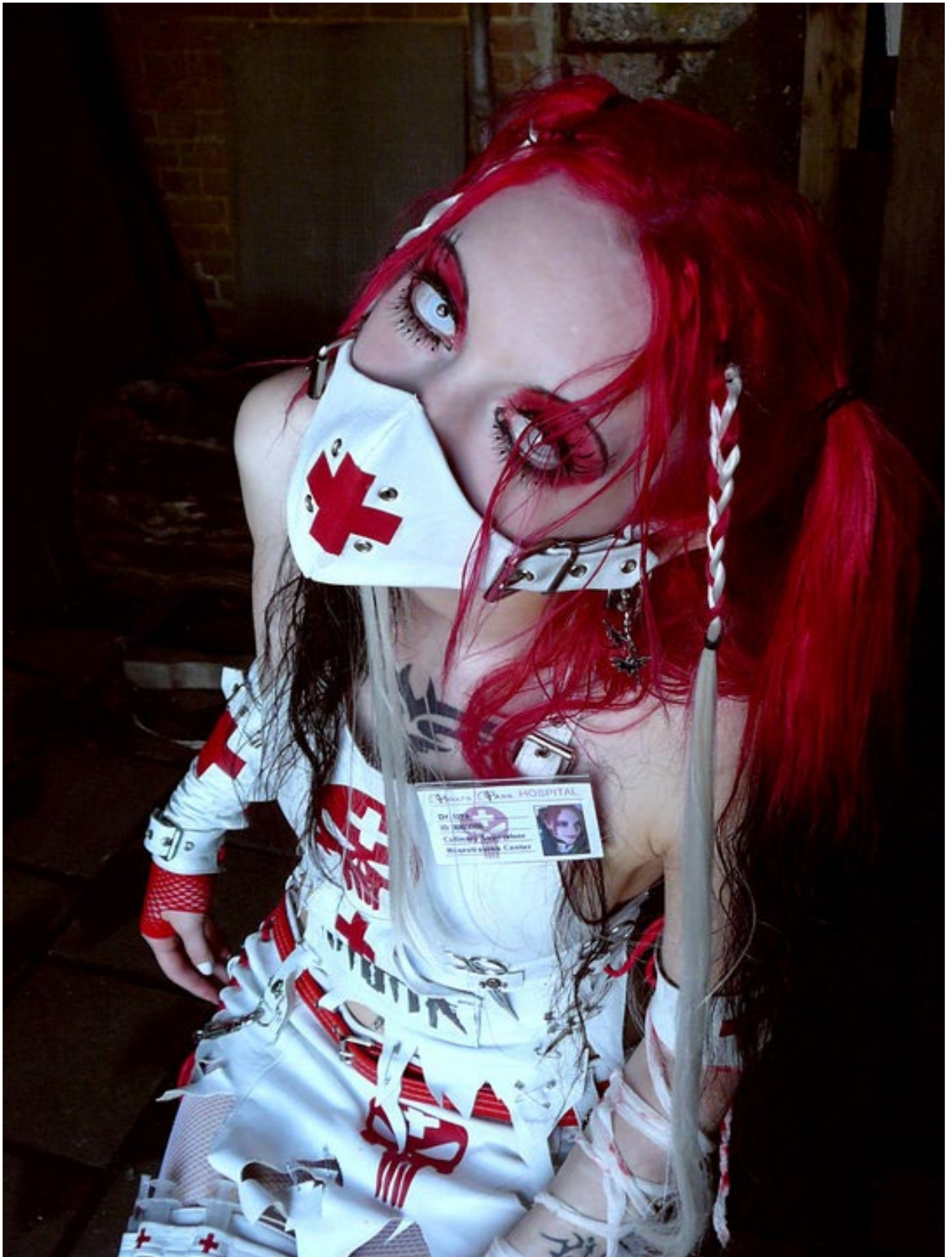
Rhea turned to face Daniel, managed a fierce glare, then stumbled and fell, hitting the asphalt face first as reality bent and crumbled. Darkness took her suddenly, so suddenly that she was lost in the depths of the Dream before she even felt the impact of her fall. Within the Dream her awareness continued and through the angry haze still lingering from her defeat, a single thought emerged.

“I will be free.” She whispered. “As long as I can dream, you can’t contain me. I will be free.”

Narcotic Nurse & the Deviants of the Future



<http://iztajupiter.deviantart.com/>

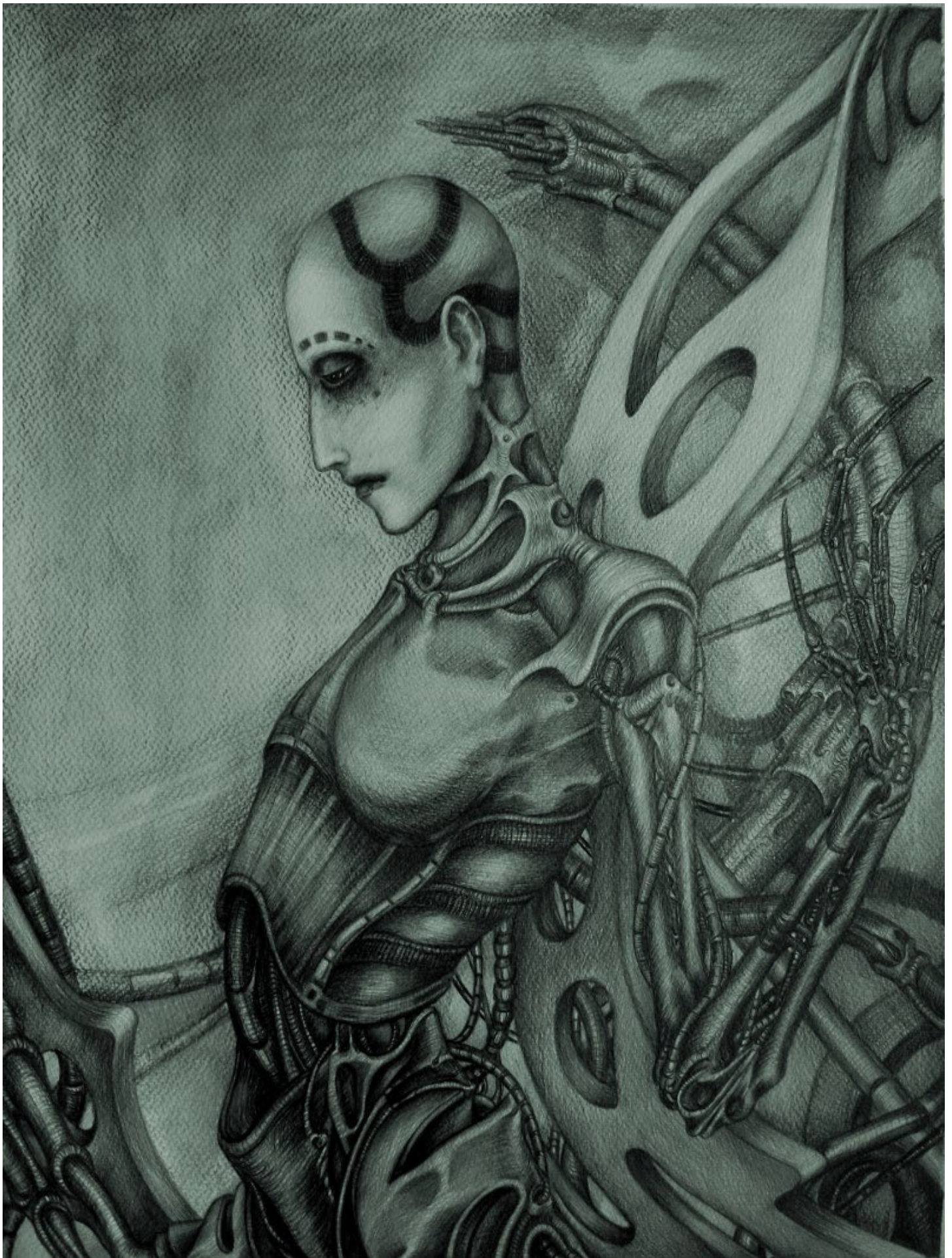












Verillis (One)

Brittany Warren

Verillis,
your contemplation
of Mayan Tramps
and volcanic death,
cause these full moons to anger,
sipping mid-wolf urination—
basic processes of where we are.

Digital scrotums malfunction at this,
procreation at zero—
no new numbers,
too sensitive to even stain meek walls,
understanding of why we are.

Verillis,
your foolish vaginal peaking
at times of second-hand clocks and hurricanes,
surprises the rotting pumpkins
with faces of porous drippings,
feeling who we are
for the flies, and the flies alone.



Brittany Warren is a twenty-two year old who resides in Massachusetts. She is a Creative Writing major, with a Specialization in Poetry at Southern New Hampshire University. Several pieces of her work have appeared in Surreal Grotesque Magazine, as well as within Insomnia Press. Currently, Brittany runs a website for her poetry to gain a wider audience called Dark Sweets Poetry, and it can be seen here: www.darksweetspoetry.webs.com. Also, she can be followed on Twitter, under the name ElegantCorpse.



DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION

A REVIEW BY COURTNEY ALSOP

As this issue's theme is cyberpunk, this month's game review is *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*. It has received high critical acclaim for obvious and well-deserved reasons. It may not exactly be horrific (unless you have a phobia of amputation or becoming a cyborg), but this first-person action role-playing video game uses the ethics of altering the human body and corporations' role in globalization to create a thought-provoking and entertaining experience.

The player controls Adam Jensen (yes, very subtle), chief of security at Sarif Industries. One day he is escorting his ex-girlfriend Megan to a summit where she will reveal her research in human augmentation technology. Suddenly Sarif is overrun by a group called the Tyrants. Sarif Industries makes robotic arms, which is great because you almost die and need augmentations to your body. Six months later you are called back to the job to resolve a crisis situation at Sarif, this time by anti-augmentation extremists called Purity First. From here you are solving the central conspiracy and delve into the implications of augmentation, as the human condition might just become a thing of the past.

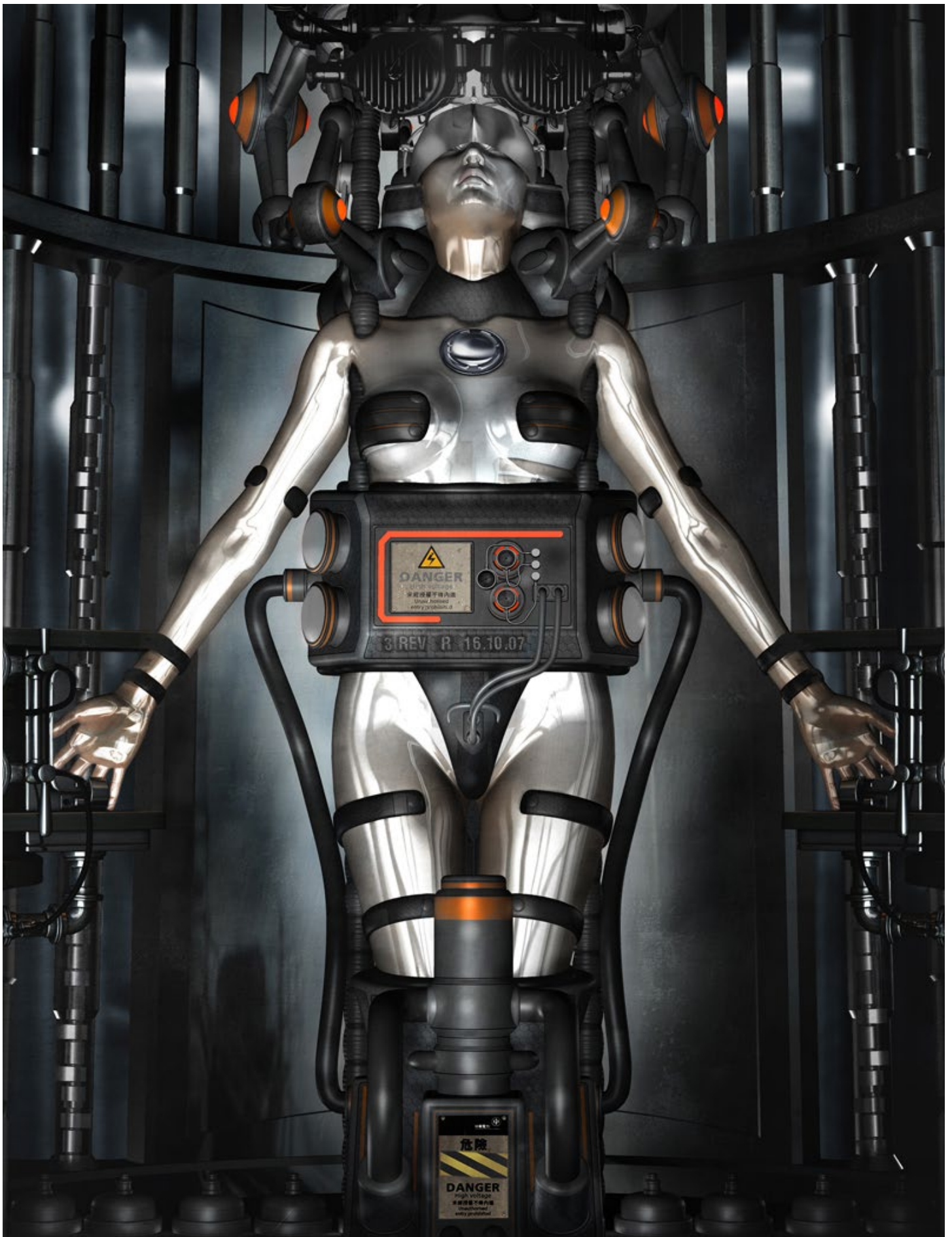
The gameplay offers the player choices in style that give this a high replay value that many new games lack. You can come upon your enemies with guns blazing, or you can avoid conflict by using stealth. A third option is throwing objects at your enemies, though it is not the smartest tactic you have. The levels are huge and intricate, allowing you to find alternate routes. The Augmentation system allows you to use a point system and upgrade your various cyborg abilities, creating even more different styles of play.

This game is not entirely without its faults. Autosave likes to save you in some ridiculous positions that you might have, admittedly, caused yourself. You might accidentally alert a group of enemies and you are hiding behind a cardboard box which cannot provide real cover. You get your brains blown out. That's ok. RIP Jensen. This is what video games are for. You expect to reload at the point where you actually entered the area. Nope. You are saved behind that cardboard box, surrounded, bullets flying at you already. Another issue is concerned with the enemy AI. To put it nicely, the enemies are a tad on the stupid side. You can take cover behind a corner and pop out to shoot. If you do not come out for a while, the enemy will believe that you are gone. When you pop back out you will surprise them. You can repeat this as much as you want, making these situations boring. You can also crouch and have an enemy right in front of you and he will overlook you. The last issue I have that irks me to no end is when the subtitles and the actual dialogue are not the same. It might seem to be a small nit-picky issue, but if you are a religious reader of subtitles even if you can clearly hear the dialogue, it is jarring.

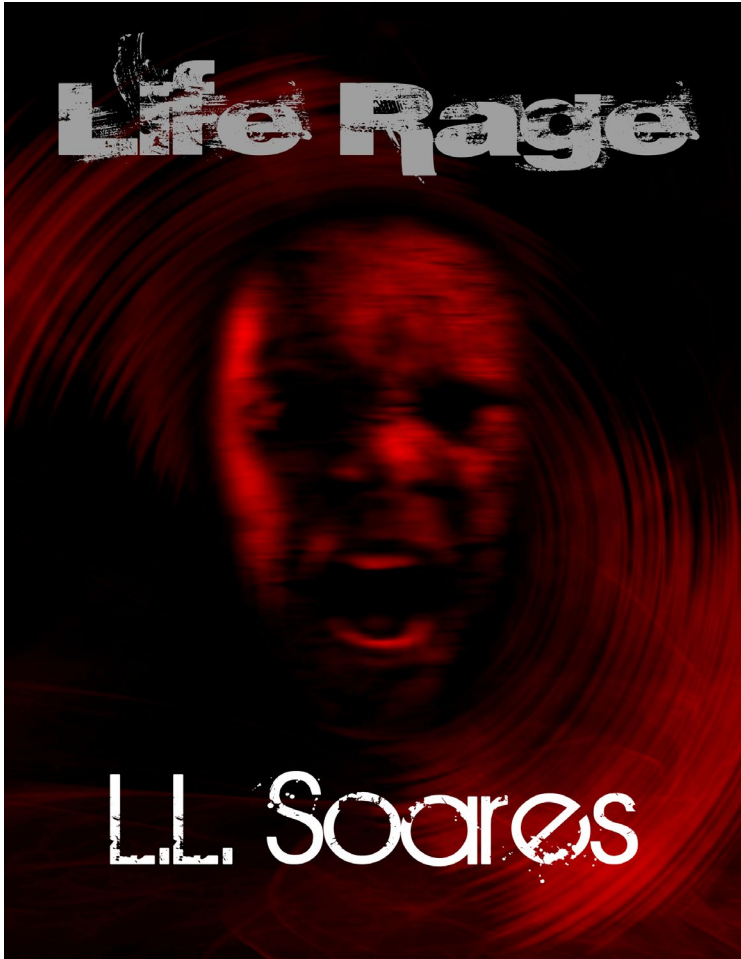
Overall, I highly recommend this game for people who love the cyberpunk genre. This game has it all: cyborgs and cybernetics, hacking, corporate globalization, and conspiracies in a near future. I have not played the previous games in this series. I argue that since this installment is a prequel, it is not necessary to play the previous games as I had no trouble understanding the story or the world it is set in.







Life Rage by L.L. Soares a review by Courtney Alsop



Sex, drinking, Quentin Tarantino levels of violence, sex, soul sucking, auras, and even more sex. This book has it all.

Life Rage by L.L. Soares is a gritty story overflowing with taboo subject matter and features a wide host of characters. Sam is a psychiatrist who specializes in anger management. Colleen sleeps with a different man every night and is going nowhere fast. Viv kills people when she has sex with them, and she is not the only one. Jeremy was a playboy until an accident leaves him a disfigured recluse. The media has named a homicidal maniac who rips people apart and sexually assaults the corpses *The Shredder*. An infectious rage sweeps that country that threatens to destroy all life on the planet.

As the title implies, the story focuses on the concept of rage. Two characters discuss how naming outrageous behaviours makes it acceptable. A young patient of Sam says, "I hear all this bullshit about road rage, air rage, black rage, white rage, male rage, female rage, kid rage. Fuck, man, I got fuck-

ing *life rage*. Just being alive makes me pissed off all the fucking time."

Part one sets up the characters and the atmosphere. Some might find part one slow going, but I argue that these early pages have a subtle grip that keeps you reading. Colleen lives in near-squalor, depressed, coughing uncontrollably. The rage of his patients is starting to seep into Sam. His wife, Maggie, is falling apart yet he cannot see it. The end of part one is defined by a murder witnessed by Colleen, and part two is a twisted and fast-paced ride.

Life Rage certainly is not for everyone, but it fits right in the *Surreal Grotesque*.







SACKS

BY M. ALLEN

Hera gave a tut of annoyance as she stepped into yet another room of plasmeld vats and translucent screens. This was the fourth clinic they had shown her. They were stalling; she had inspected enough institutions to know when someone was trying to stall. But these two weren't like the others. They didn't have that same guilty skulking that usually surfaced, and were instead clear and precise in their answers, as if they had just shown her four identical rooms purely for the sake of unnecessary completeness. Worse still, all the way through bore the exact same ever-so-slight smile - a forced expression that made them more like manikins than real people.

Surgeons, she concluded, surgeons were always a little weird. All that interfering with life seemed to desensitise them from the world. Apparently it didn't take long for the damage to show because these two were still fairly young, unusually so for those in charge of a facility of this size. Hera shrugged it off as a sign of the changing times. A lot of progress was being made in medicine, especially genetics, and it seemed to favour the younger experts who found it easier to abandon the poor habits of old.

"I think I've seen quite enough clinics, thank-you," said Hera sharply. "If I'm to perform this full inspection I will need to see your research laboratories as soon as possible." After all, the Central Board could access the clinics whenever they wanted.

The two scientists, and they considered themselves to be scientists rather than part of that butchering profession of surgery, glanced at each other, both aware of the problems which were almost certain to follow. Dr Jones was silently selected to reply.

"I'm sure that won't be strictly necessary. As you can appreciate we keep our research quite discreet, but our clinics are leading the industry and most certainly fulfil all guidelines your Central Board has set in place." His voice was soft and fluid, attempting to tease Hera into his way of thinking.

"You can turn me away if you wish but then your entire facility will be shut down, research laboratories included. This is not a voluntary inspection; *everything* must be checked." and with that Hera strode out of the room defiant. Did they really think they could pass her off so easily? These surgeons were certainly hiding something; probably dumping the wrong kinds of waste or buying materials from the wrong sources. Why did they bother with it? She had seen plenty of cases where the cost of hiding bad practice outweighed the amount saved, and they were always discovered eventually.

The scientists exchanged another glance and Dr Jones lead the way to the laboratories. It wasn't Hera's fault, but she would be the one to suffer thanks to the Central Board's desire to obstruct progress, under some notion of obligation to burden them with rules and guidelines. Imagine the breakthroughs they could have made without such interference.

Dr Jenkins placed a careful hand on Hera's shoulder as they walked, letting her words uncoil and linger as she spoke. "We understand you are to be a mother yourself. If you are interested in any of our techniques from a personal perspective, please let us know."

Instinctively Hera clutched her abdomen. She did not understand surgeons. No other institution had ever treated an inspection as anything but a professional, if disruptive, necessity, yet here she was being sold inappropriate treatments. The genetic alterations performed here were an affront to the natural beauty of bearing a child, not that she expected them to truly understand such a thing. All she wanted was to get to the research labs, discover the technicality that these clinical oafs were breaching, and then start the process of setting things

right.

Dr Jenkins called a cable car which would take the trio through passageways barely lit by phosphorescent strips and into the underground laboratories. It was admirable how Hera recoiled at the prospect of early genetic alteration. Entirely misguided of course, but nonetheless admirable. Still, she would not prevent the nature of progress. She wanted to see their research and see it she would.

"I'm sure I don't need to tell you that this is confidential research," said Dr Jones, reading the anxiety in Hera's worried hands. It would seem that the pair of them had set her on edge.

"I assure you I treat these things very seriously, Dr Jones. As long as you are compliant with regulations nothing in my report will be seen by anyone outside of the Central Board." Hera stood quite rigid, focussing on a point directly in front of her, or at least as well as she could manage it with the trundling vibrations of the cable car. She felt terribly uneasy. This kind of transport wasn't uncommon in research facilities - remnants of old government efforts to hide from probing satellites - and she usually found it easy to reassure herself that it was perfectly safe despite appearances, but this was the first time she had tried to do so whilst pregnant. It wasn't the same when you were putting the life of your child into something that instinctively felt unsafe.

"Then let us proceed so your Central Board can be confident in our standards of practice," said Dr Jenkins, picking up where Dr Jones had left off. She had worked with closely Dr Jones for over seven decades - not that anyone would have known by looking at them - and after all that time they were beginning to think almost identically.

When the cable car settled at its destination, Dr Jones offered to help Hera down the steps. She declined, and for a brief moment Dr Jenkins noted traces of fear in her eyes. The pair of them had definitely set her on edge. They proceeded down the corridor until they reached the riveted steel door that was the entrance to the building's research centre. Dr Jenkins activated the retina scan and punched her number code into the terminal.

As the door slid open Hera was met by a sight that forced her to her knees: infinite rows of human foetuses dangled from tubes which coiled around their pink underdeveloped bodies. She cradled her abdomen as feelings of putrid disgust overwhelmed her and made her wretch, but the surgeons stood still, ignorant of their horrific practice.

"We do not like to waste resources," said Dr Jones calmly.

Hera barely heard the words. All she could do was look on, surrounded by the hanging foetuses. It wasn't real, couldn't be real, why were they showing her an illusion?

"You see, even with proper gamete matching techniques few embryos have the potential to become viables," continued Dr. Jenkins, "and it takes a great deal of energy to develop them to a point where we can be sure."

Just an illusion. The little pink sacks were not real. Why was she here anyway, and who wasn't a viable? Tiny. Little. Sacks.

Dr Jones continued, "To maintain efficiency we drain the non-viables that you see here. It's a slow process but remarkably little energy is lost."

Just little sacks of pink, pink, pink, being sucked dry. They swing with the wind. My little sack of pink, spinning round me, round me. Where did she go?

"You know Dr Jones, she doesn't look all too well."

Who? Who were these people? And why were they concerned about her when it was the room that was wrong. The room was all wrong - so very, very wrong.

Hera slumped into the sterile floor. Dr Jones grabbed her beneath the arms and began to drag her into an adjacent room where Dr Jenkins was already preparing a syringe.

"The modifications should be straightforward, then we can send her back to the Central Board." A slither of relief being the only emotion in his voice. Hera's reaction had not been certain.

"And the embryo?"

"Leave it. If she miscarries later she won't think to suspect us anyway."

"Exactly what I was thinking."





FEVER DREAMS

BY ADRIA WEST

When you first noticed the bite on your arm
It was small, nothing to fear
There was not a cause for alarm
The pain didn't throb or sear
It was dull, but infection came
The fever surged, a silent curse
A wild heat that could not be tamed
And sanity dispersed

Fever dreams
A presence rifling through your memory
A twisted trickster filled with restless glee
Sending phantasms, intensity
Worlds that before you could not see

Fever dreams
Oh, how they haunt you in the sucking heat
Swarms of insects seeking easy meat
Filled with need, thousands and thousands of beating wings
Backlit by a blood red sky, under a sun where life has died

Fever dreams.
The steady dripping of a poison dart
Quick vines of panic of which you're a part
The labored beating of corrupted hearts
You are theirs
Flushed and frenzied as the fire flares.

Walls are growing blinking eyes
Voices chant and growl and cry
Is this death or revelation, lies?
Tossing and turning in tangled sheets
Struggling to know and breathe
Caught in the thrall of they who strive to reap
You fight for your mind, in which they seep

Fever dreams
The poison creeping through your arteries
Filling your mind with warping, surging heat
Bitter venom, strange and sweet.

We lie on living beds
That speak soft soothing whispers inside our heads
Telling of the place we'll see
Deception and writhing trees.
A land of rampant disease
Delirium on a silent breeze

Bedroom walls have ears, and know of your fears
Moths thrum from the plaster to feed off of tears
Reality has fallen, and now madness reigns
This is joy; this is sadness, pleasure and pain

But like all things, the sickness withers and breaks
Your eyes snap open, finally awake
Nothing left but embers, a dull little ache
And the triumphant hissing of the fever snake.

CATALYST

BY ADRIA WEST

Primordial womb
The remnants of dead celestial bodies
Your corpses sprawled before nothingness, too many instances
Of why this universe could never be called sane

You were cracked through the middle, holding the end
Of a promise in your decaying fingernails
And I didn't pry, no
A music box left unwound
For fear that the song will return
Louder and crueler than before
Thin notes rupturing the palpating organ
That knows when your soul is no longer yours

Stardust ignited, gathered in a mindless fist
Boiled under floorboards in the house with no doors
Until the boards flew free from the pressure
A wound in the earth
A fissure
Discord, a mistake that made us come alive
Silver filaments bending limbs unnaturally
Strings cutting through creased joints
Polluted rivers running on white-washed canvas

Eat and eat and eat
Until the Catalyst returns
And decimates what is left
Makes us want oblivion again
We were locked together, always
Like little paper dolls
Until the world tore us apart
Separate in the Void again
Fetal and unformed

We carry the dead through boundless shadowlands
They are long-bodied and with spongy mushroom skin
But with diamond teeth that gnash when disquieting sounds
Shudder sickeningly through the undergrowth
The snapping twigs remind one of what its like to have
Bones broken again and again
Never setting right, never normal
Part of me never stopped screaming

The frost muffles it, you see, and the fog hides these gashes
So I still look pretty and no one knows until they get close
Or grow a pair of eyes to see the spectrum of our
Flaws, poison spores flitting like little dancers

No matter how much you dig you can always go
A little deeper
No matter how much you cry you can always weep
A little longer, harder
Nourish what waits in the house with no doors
And maybe it will give you rest

A catalyst, my orphaned work in progress
Stitches hanging from a mouth that coughs soot
And the bile we collected for millenia
Help me understand what ails you
We can't fix you
Unless you tell us why you're wrong

It won't fix us
We must take this needle and thread
And patch ourselves together
Lest we become another filthy mess of rags
In its deserted dollhouse



4.02.2010

A Therapy Session with Jeremy C. Shipp,
Writer of the Odd, somnambulist and
sociopath

Acting Psychologist and Chronic
Masturbator, Daniel W. Gonzales



Q: Hi. My name is Danny and I will be your interviewer today. I follow you on Facebook and I have to say, you are one funny bastard. How does one become such a bastard?

A: Hi. My name is Jeremy and I will be your interviewee. I think people whose first names end in y are inherently funny. That's been proven both scientifically *and* astrologically.

Q: You work for Redrum Horror. Would you consider yourself more bizarro or more of a Horror writer?

A: My horror stories are quite bizarre and my bizarro stories are quite horrific. So really, there's no difference between the two. I am whatever people think I am. Yesterday, someone thought of me as a bird, so I grew wings and flew to San Juan Capistrano for cupcakes.

Q: You have several volumes of Attic Clown stories for sale on Amazon. Where does this obsession with clowns come from? Was it a childhood trauma of some

sort? Were you molested by clowns?

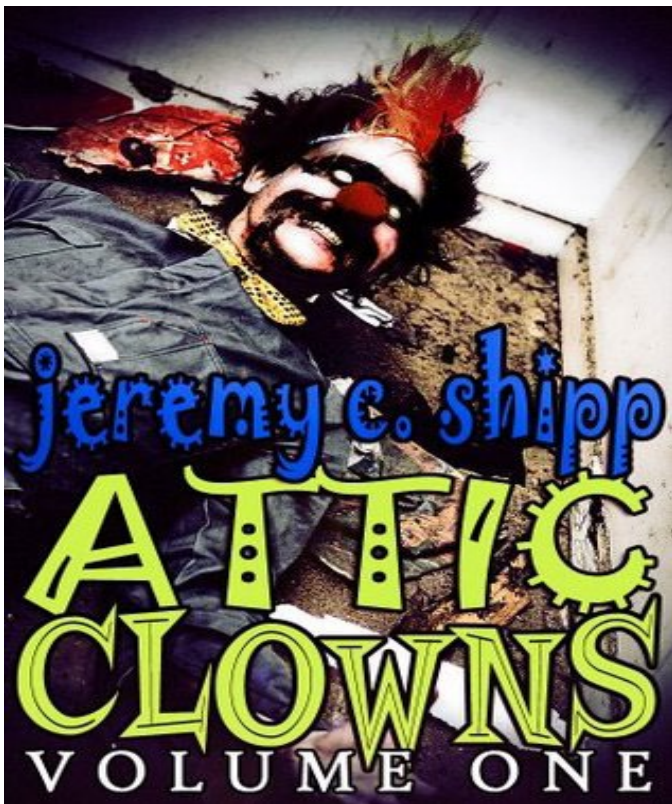
A: I did traumatize many a clown when I was a boy. I devoured a couple of them, but I left most of them alive to wallow in their cotton candy-flavored misery. Perhaps it's a form of poetic justice that my attic is infested with a murder of demonic clowns who torment me every chance they get. But on second thought, it's probably just bad luck.

Q: I saw a story by you recently in Cemetery Dance magazine, a magazine I would literally cut off my pinkie finger to be in. How does one become as awesome as you and does it hurt to be so awesome?

A: To be awesome, all you have to do is work hard every day for years and years, bleeding and crying and smearing your soul onto the page. The process doesn't exactly hurt, but it does tingle a little.

Q: When you fell from Narnia, did it hurt?

A: It hurt Mr. Tumnus, because he fell first, and I landed on him. He broke my fall as well as his little goat legs.



Q: Who do you think are the best writers working today?

A: I want everyone reading this to check out a publisher called Omnium Gatherum. They're putting out many amazing books by brilliant authors, and they deserve more attention. <http://omniumgatherumbooks.com/>

Q: What are your favorite horror movies and one comedy?

A: Some of my favorites are Audition, Psycho, Eraserhead, Dead Alive, [Rec], The Exorcist, Ringu, The Descent, Let the Right One In, May, Battle Royale, A Tale of Two Sisters. One of my favorite comedies is The Lost Skeleton of Cadavra.

Q: If you had to describe your writing style in seven oblique words, what would they be?

A: Spork. Grenadine. Avalanche. Spindle. Razzmatazz. Plankton. Snapdragon.

Q: What do you think the key is to making it as a writer today: Is it drugs, talent or starting one's own publishing company and forcing people to read it?

A: It's all about talent, working hard, marketing, and luck. Oh, and peanut butter.

Q: Here at Surreal Grotesque, we are huge Twilight fans because we just love classic vampire literature. (tries hard not to laugh) If you had to choose between Kristen Stewart and the naked werewolf boy, tell us why you would choose him?

A: Because Kristen Stewart broke Edward's cold vampiric heart, and I'll never forgive her for that. Uh...what I mean to say is...what's Twilight and who's Kristen Stewart?

Q: Let's try some post-hypnotic regression. What is your first memory of childhood?

A: My first memory is a nightmare. A monster with a thousand pointy teeth jumped out at me and growled. I was so happy.

Q: Okay, now I'm going to say several words and you say the first words that comes to mind after each one. Sticky...weird....republican...gumby....enchilada....

A: Once upon a time, there was a sticky stick named Sticky that found himself in a weird situation involving a Republican toaster with a gumby haircut and an enchilada waterfall.

Q: I'm going to hold up two invisible pictures, tell me what they are.

A: Arg, Danny, I just threw up a little in my mouth. Those pictures are disgusting. I'm not even going to attempt to put them into words. But I will put them into song. La la la poop and death. La la la so much meth.

Q: Final Question: If green is red and red is blue and dogs bark yellow, what are you?

A: I'm a rainbow, and I want everyone to taste me.





SEX ADVICE WITH SEAN M. THOMPSON AKA THE ORGASM MASTER

Dear Master of Orgasms:

I've heard that you have a thirteen inch penis and fuck better than most porn stars. Is this true? And if so, your girlfriend has to be the luckiest woman alive.

Sincerely,

Sean M. Thompson—

Every Girl in the World

Dear Every Girl in the World,

It's actually 13 and a half inches, and you have heard correctly. I taught James Deen everything that he knows, and Peter North came to me to learn how to...well, drown ladies. My girlfriend is not the luckiest woman alive, because daily I almost kill her. For it's not just the length, but the tremendous girth of my tallywacker, that is the force to be reckoned with. She's currently wheelchair bound, so send her your thoughts and prayers. I'm praying she doesn't find out how Belladonna learns some of her best positions when she's off set.

DEAR OM:

I'm a 45 year old woman obsessed with having sex with 18 year old boys. I often come on to my son's friends when they come over after he gets out of classes. Is this wrong? Should I tell my son that I want to bang his best friend?

Sincerely,

Bad Mommy

Dear Bad Mommy,

No, it's not wrong. The body wants what it wants. I say, you tell your brat of a son to go get a video camera, and some lube. Then, tell his friend he is in for the ride of his life. Feel free to call your husband into the room while this beautiful act of coitus is filmed. He is sure to love every second of it, and may even want to join in, after high-fiving your son, and his friend. Then, maybe some Eiffel tower action. With your hubby, and your son's friend, of course. Incest leads to 'tarded babies. Remember, your son will want to film this sweet three way embrace from the side, otherwise it'll just be one dude's asshole and balls. So, in summation, cum all over your son's friends, cum onto lots of them. Cum all over as many of them as you can, since let's face it, you're only a few short years away from death's icy grip.

DEAR OM:

Hey bro. My girlfriend laughs at me for having a small penis. I tell her it's not my fault God punished me by giving me a three inch penis. She has suggested that I get a penis enlargement. What should I do?

Sincerely,

Stumpy in Seattle

Dear Stumpy,

Go get a hooker. Not only will she not make fun of your penis, but she'll pretend like it's as big as mine. But, if you're a whiny bitch who is afraid of catching gonorrhea, then why not get a penis enlargement. I know a guy who does them real cheap in Tijuana, who keeps things somewhat sterile, and has only lost five patients out of ten. That's a fifty percent success rate, so think about it. I'll email you his info, if you write me back. I had him do my nipple piercing, and I'm happy to say, they were able to save the nipple, it's just dark purple now. But this ring looks awesome.

Dear Mr. Thompson:

This is a writing question. I consider myself a feminist writer and I am trying to create a strong female role model for future generations. A sort of cross between Xena Warrior Princess and Katniss, but not a lesbian. In my story, women can procreate asexually so there is no need for men. Yet women keep men as pets and slaves to amuse them. What do you think about this? I personally find it to be an ideal world.

Sincerely,

A Vibrator is Better than a Messy Man

Dear Deluded Twat,

What the fuck was your writing question? I've read this over twice, and all I read is blah blah blah Xena blah blah Vibrator. I assume your writing question is, would there be a market for a ridiculous story about men as pets and slaves. The answer to that question is, of course. And that market consists of lesbians, much like you. And not the hot kind of lesbians, who aren't really lesbians, but are just attention whores. No, you madam, are a real lesbian, one who won't shave their armpits, and won't wax their mustache, and won't stop swearing up and down that you don't need a man, yet will continually insert penis substitutes inside herself. Christ, I hate my damn niece. Yet, we all know what you really want, you can't have. You go to sleep, and wish for a long, veiny dong, but it just won't happen, Large Marge. My ideal world consists of attention whore lesbians.

DEAR OM:

I am a 21 year old virgin. I'm not ugly but I'm just really shy. My friends say that I should just hook up with a guy at a party or something and get it over with but I want it to be really romantic like Bella and Edward in Twilight. What do you think? Should I wait for true love or just give it up?

Sincerely,

Shy in Omaha

Dear Shy in Omaha,

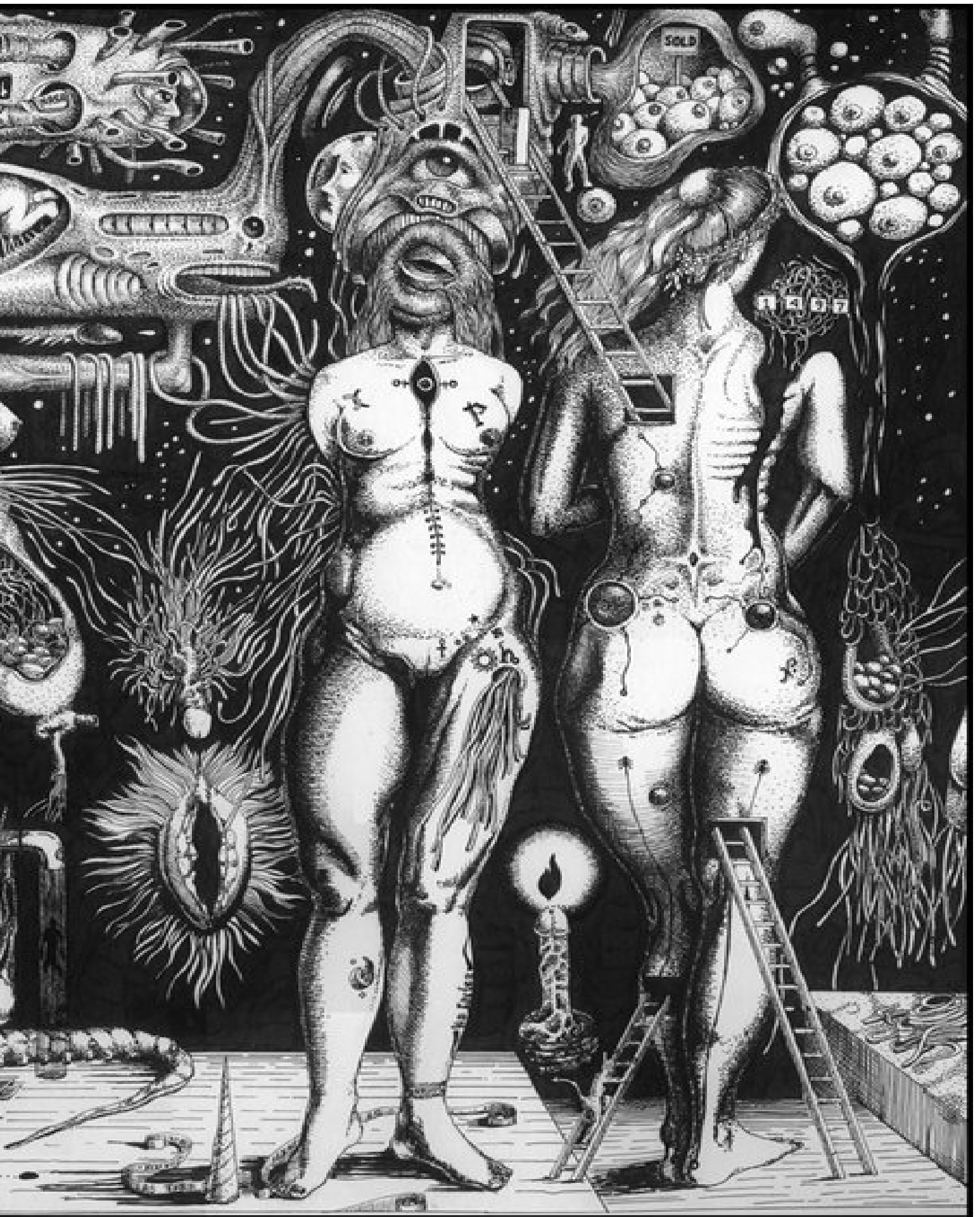
Email me, and I'll find a cheap motel in the Omaha area. Let's pop that cherry.



© GITH 2011

<http://githos.deviantart.com/>







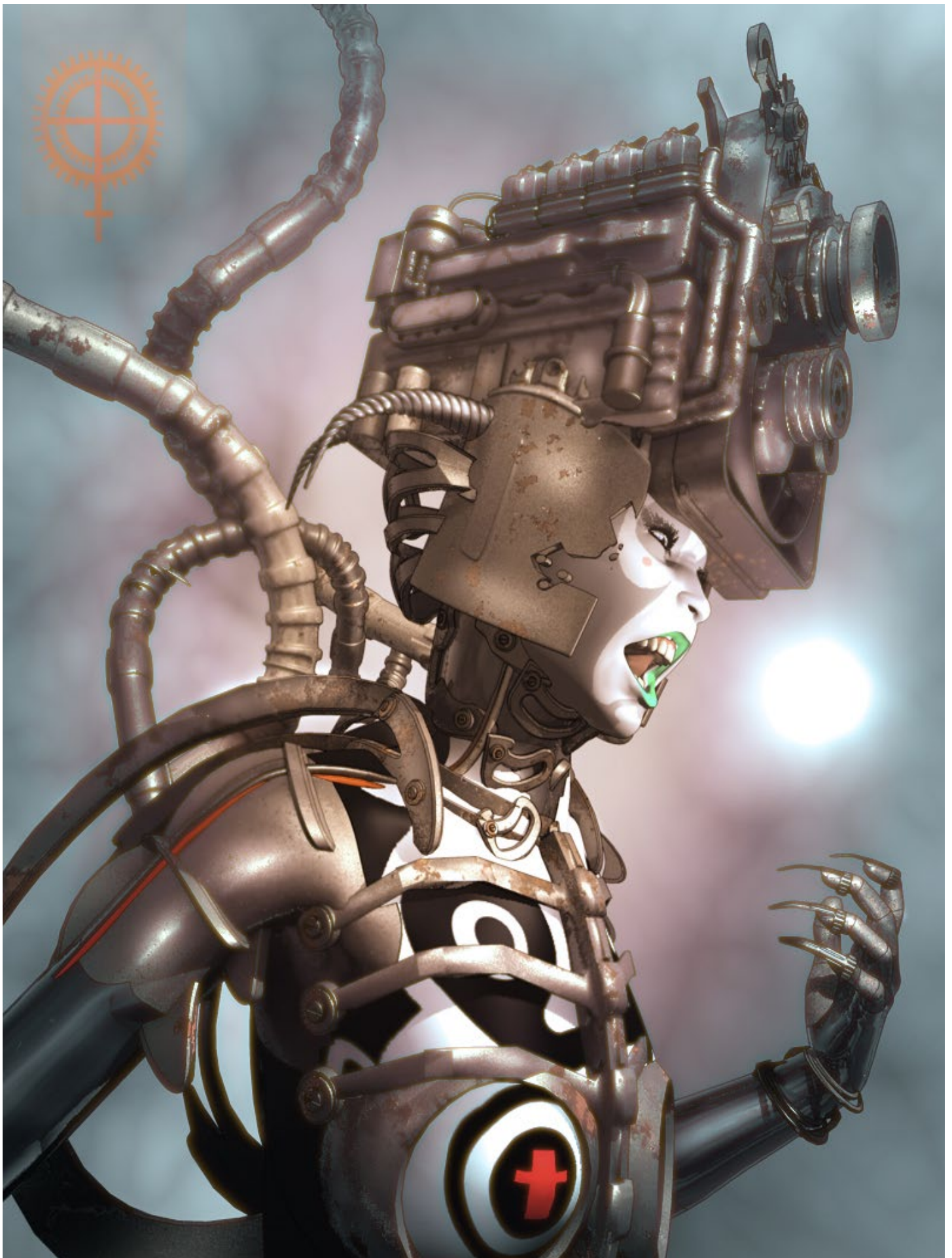
Available for sale at nakthag.com
nurserycrimes.com



ZOMBIE TRAMP

BATH SALT







Watch out for that hole!





THE ENTOMOLOGIST

BY ADRIA WEST

He keeps them all in little glass jars

In stagnant lakes of formaldehyde

Or pinned proudly to wooden frames

Neat print spelling their strange names

But many are alive, more delightful in motion

(Scolopendra gigantea, my deadly lady)

Ever so slightly off, these angles

Asymmetrical and nonsensical

Grasping details he didn't notice before

But awareness only blooms in the basement

(something's not right here)

Microscopes and blinding beams

Slender hands prod, a playful grin gleams

Chloroform and miniature surgeries

Finding the sublime behind compound eyes

Others shiver, avoid their touch

But his attention is glued to

Sleek shells and bristling legs and wings like

Dirty stained glass windows

Color bleached by a downpour that never ends

(something's gone wrong inside me)

He'll take them apart tenderly

Like the patients in his office

(don't go into the monster's den)

Whose psychosis is as old and ugly

As anything in the doctor's collection

Oh, yes, they'll squirm and stray

They'll scream and try to crawl away

But in the end he'll have what he came for

(this isn't what I'm here for)

Too many legs, mandibles like twin vices

Armor red and regal like a Chinese army

She is the rejected bride

(my Lilith, gorgeous but damned)

The missing piece of a demented riddle

And her venomous clenching embrace

Will steal away all your memories

Replacing them with dark fantasies

(will you make me whole again?)

A dead man studies dead things

While he notes your form and function

You feel the stroking of a thousand curious feelers

(I just want to taste your fear)

The kissing of a thousand eager mouths

And know you are trapped

A faded soul pinned and stretched out

Captured and deeply known

(I just want to fix you)

Primal reprisal fears

Are brought into the open and tested

Tickled into spilling all your secrets

Unending hallways and futile chases

A bogeyman humming a teasing tune

As this figure beyond all reason bursts

From the shaded hospital room

Inches away, right behind you

(this is part of your therapy)

Like prehistoric curiosities in amber tombs

Like larvae seething in cold wombs

A twisted metamorphosis was undergone

Something right and real went in the cocoon

And a worm came out

and zero is the biggest by ~jaani-androphile

raspberry thorns piercing through membranes

of adroit ballerinas with pointe shoes,

bones smashed against the wood;

they are mangled bodies of birds with suitcases tucked in their wings

phrases spilling from their lips:

(i might lose important papers)

scattered along with liquefied brains on the floor.

he was so afraid, that his immune system was having a seizure,

(its brain was falling apart [birds, birds, birds])

and they opened up the zeroth dimension

(you're the biggest zero out there)

infinity upon infinity, negatives, and ten.

among the scattered papers, she will dance with you again

and i call it revolting by ~jaani-androphile

and tongues that wag like the tail of a dog,

shit-stained teeth that glare in the suffocating light,

bouncing off lips that crack with each move,

canyons of dry skin as if fingers peeled it

like a sickly brown banana, pus slithering,

a melted snake, with a melted red tongue,

flowing between its lips.

lashes like whips that slap at the cheek,

worms burying into thin ducts, curling upwards,

away from the white swamp with mold in the center,

a vile stench stinging their nostrils.

they lick the pus from the canyons,

inserting their tongue in between cracked skin,

gazing into swamps, fluttering the worms,

and wagging their tongue like a dog.

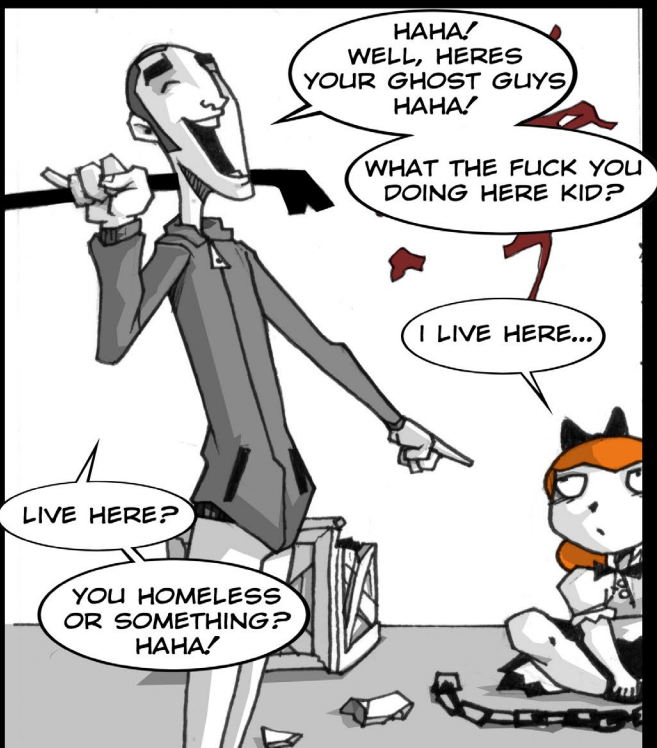
they call it romantic.

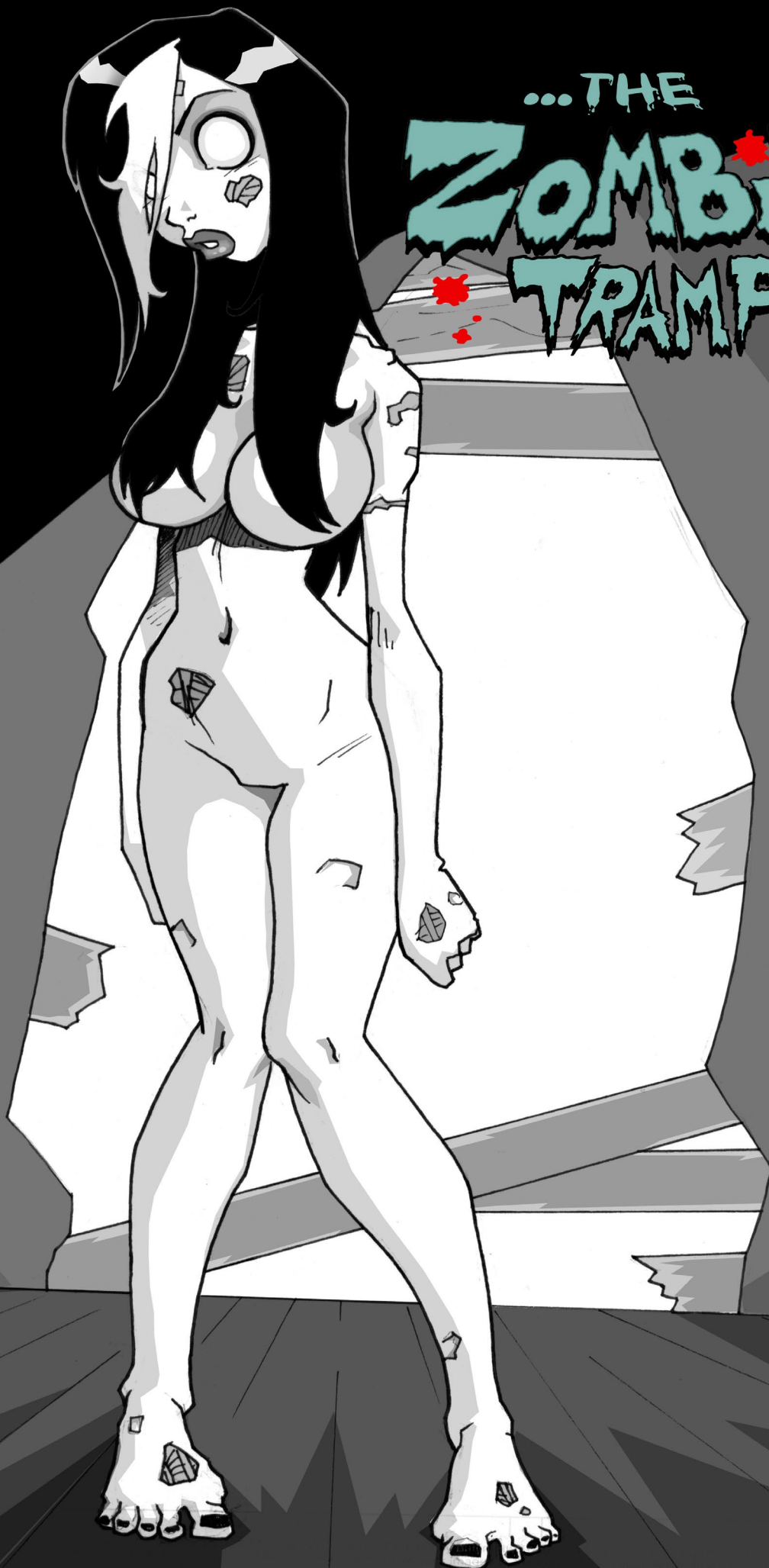
For more disturbing poetry: <http://jaani-androphile.deviantart.com/>

ZOMBIE TRAMP



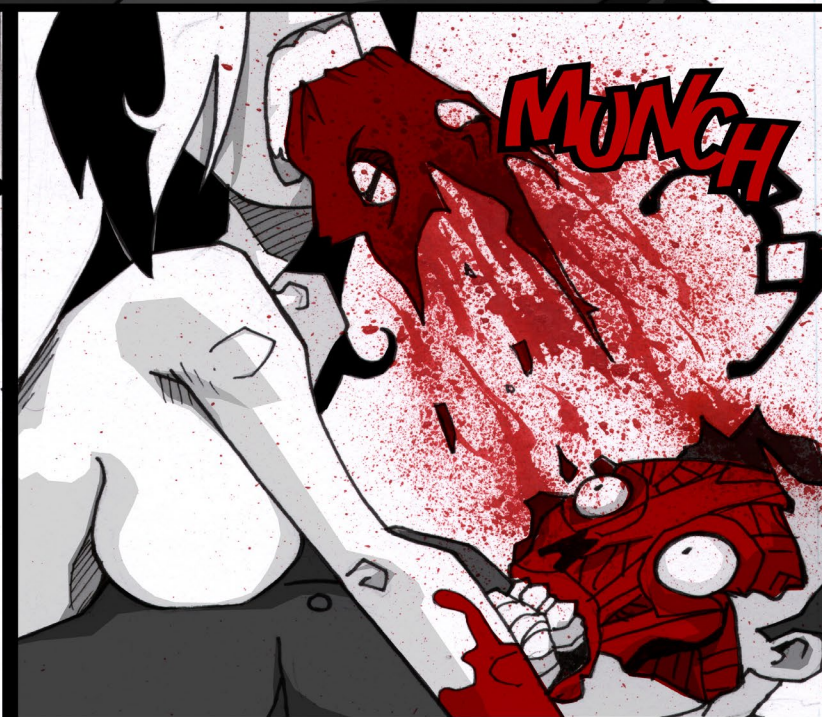
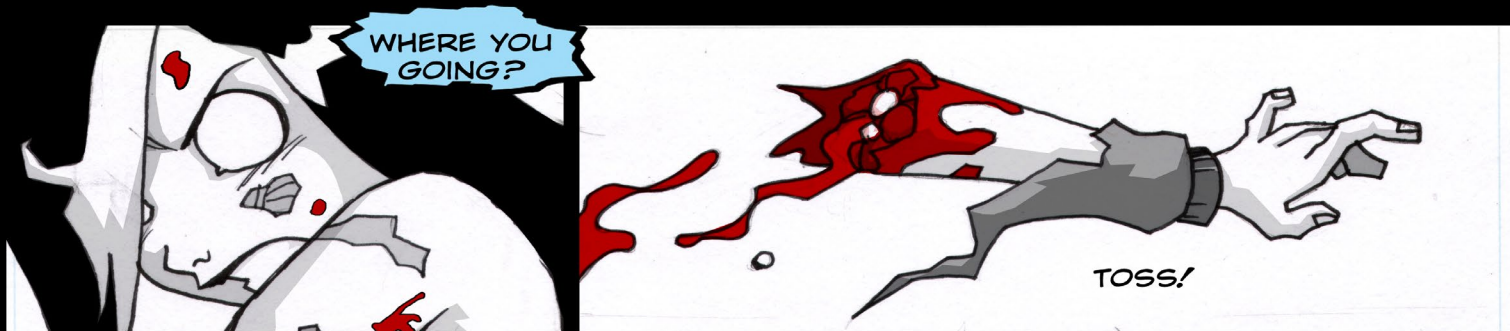
ERE
IES
Y BELLE.
THE
ZOMBIE TRAMP
THAT RESTS
IN
HELL.





...THE
ZOMBIE
TRAMP







SYSTEM CRASH

Ashe Armstrong

For six years she'd been on a quest. For six long years she'd been putting it all together. She'd scraped, fought, stole or fucked to get everything she'd needed. She'd been chosen. She had worked in pointless labor from one unhappy job to the next, surviving before it all began. The kind of life where you don't notice when it's raining. Then her dreams began changing. They grew dark, ominous. They flashed with visions of death and madness, rotting corpses, ancient structures few had ever laid eyes on and were filled with a sense of dread power. They were unrelenting, covering her mind's eye as soon as she was asleep. Any ordinary person would've called them nightmares. But not her. No, not her.

She felt arousal at the sheer power she felt enter her dreamscape. It was like nothing she'd ever known or heard of. Alien and massive. It shook the foundations of what could be loosely called her life. A few months after the dreams started, her arousal was blatantly exploited as ancient tendrils caressed her to the sound of massive, membranous wings flapping. The movements and rhythm were slow, steady, patient and as the tendrils sought to penetrate her dream self, she would awake, her groin aching. As time passed, these dreams grew in scope and horrible pleasure and she stopped waking from them so soon. She saw creatures from the deep parts of the ocean as much as she saw the death and madness and chaos of what she came to understand was the outcome of the purpose she'd been chosen for. Months later, she overslept for work. When she finally came to, she was drenched with sweat, feeling euphoric and a deep sense of preparation. There had been no words. Just that purpose filling her. She knew what her destiny was.

Her boss at the courier shop was her first pawn. The lecherous fool was all too easy to ensnare. He'd been making passes at her since she started working there. Though he would never realize what happened, she would make him wish he'd never seen her. He funded the first trip and the first batch of equipment. Cyberspace decks that she ultimately modded to be automated, equipped with icebreakers and under her command. Hoshitsu, Daihashi, Zaibitsu, whatever she could get.

She found the hackers to rid her of her former employer and teach her how to ride. It was a simple matter for them to re-write his books and alert the authorities. Away he went to prison and away she went into the system for her first lessons. She learned quickly and became a console cowboy in her own right. She got a new job during this time, beginning the process again.

Businessmen, hackers, bankers, clerks, whatever she needed, she got. She set the decks up all over the nation. Planting them with an undoubted blueprint stemming from her dreams. Dreams she had even while awake now.

She worked until her preparation was complete. Until she sat quiet and still in the middle of a dingy basement not remembering or caring what city it was. The gravity of what she was about to do pushed down on her. The moment had come at last. "Finally," she thought, her hand creeping down her stomach, aiming for pleasure. She halted, reminding herself that the pleasure would come after. Before her, was a pile of conquered

technology. The Hoshitsu deck and its accompanying gloves sat waiting to engulf her eyes, entering her into the great hallucination that was the maxim. She gathered the deck and gloves to herself. The gloves were light, sheer and covered in electrodes. She had then covered each electrode in a small gold piece with a strange symbol upon it. She slipped the left glove onto her slender hand. The glove swallowed her hand. She slipped the other on and adjusted them, checked their connections and when she was satisfied, she picked up the deck. She picked up the deck, likewise now covered with gold plates and eerie symbols, and slid it on, pushing back her dark hair. The eyepieces slid into place comfortably and she jacked in. She went high, viewing the continent digitally. The cyberspace map showed her what anyone could see. She performed a motion with her left hand. Cyberspace melted into new signals. The outline of countries remained but the data flows were blank now. With her right hand she sent the start-up signal, linking with all her other decks and watched as they began lighting up. Each one shone red, forming a pattern she'd been shown in the dreams.

She'd learned much during the horrific ecstasy of the dreams. She'd learned the where, the who and the how of it all. She'd learned that the symbol forming both digitally and literally right now was the origin of the pentacle. The symbol vaguely resembled one or rather the pentacle vaguely resembled it. The pentacle had been a corruption of it. The first vessel had failed, she had not.

She moved her left hand again to show any ice that would come into contact with the program she was about to run. When the decks had all activated, she flipped the regular flow of data back on, underneath the ice, underneath the decks. With another motion, they began their coordinated attack on every other system on the planet. They started with small systems, infecting everything. She began chanting as she worked the programs. Words no one but the most esoteric of academia might chance to recognize. The deck signals glowed brighter.

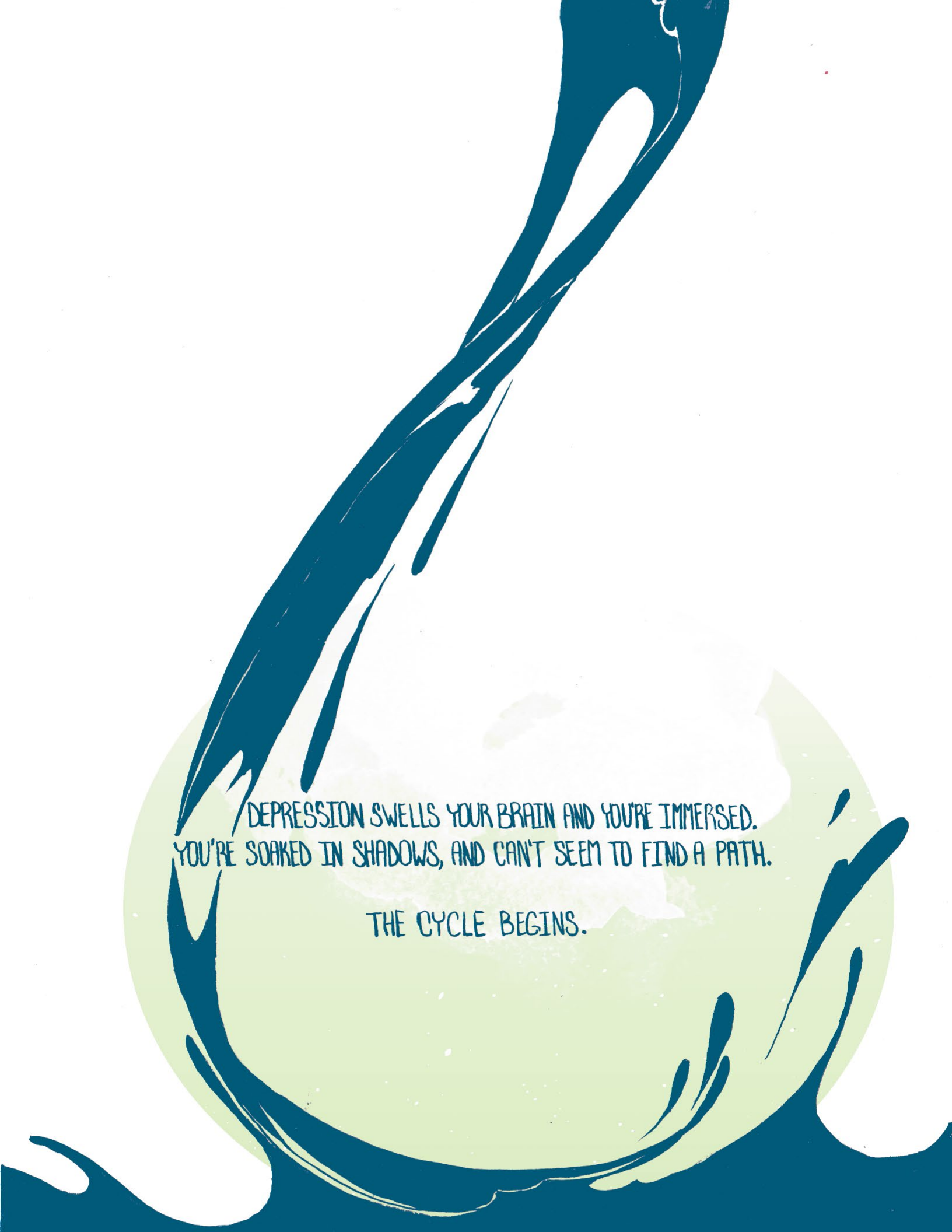
In Beijing, several planes went down. In London, subways crossed tracks, hurdling passed their destined stops and collided into each other. The whole of Japan nearly imploded in the attack. Chiba City shutdown completely. All the major North American cities began systematically crashing. No defense could stand. The decks and the icebreakers had been imbued with power. Remade into instruments of an eldritch power. The now supernatural program crashed through any ice like it wasn't even there. By the time military and corporate ice started shattering, she no longer had to direct anything. It was now automated and hands free.

The damage was done before anyone could know what happened. A deluge of blood flowed across cities. She checked the news networks and smiled as their sketchy signals were reporting death tolls in the thousands. Deep in the south Pacific, the ocean bubbled violently. A maelstrom began forming quickly and every living mind heard a deep, inhuman laughter. Cyclopean architecture began poking through the surface of the water. In the middle of the Atlantic, water exploded and then was sucked down in a massive whirlpool. Rotting spires began their ascent. Lakes boiled, rivers overflowed and the earth shook. All houses of power eons old awakened once more. The world howled.

The process as she viewed it through the maxim was breathtakingly beautiful. The destruction aired to her in a gruesome definition of data. She began breathing heavily and let a glove fall to the floor. Her hand wandered across her stomach and made its way down. The elders were rising. She caressed herself, shivered. "Hallelujah."

Ashe Armstrong lives in Tulsa, OK. His influences include Lovecraft, Poe, Gaiman, and suffering from night terrors as a child.





DEPRESSION SWELLS YOUR BRAIN AND YOU'RE IMMersed.
YOU'RE SOAKED IN SHADOWS, AND CAN'T SEEM TO FIND A PATH.

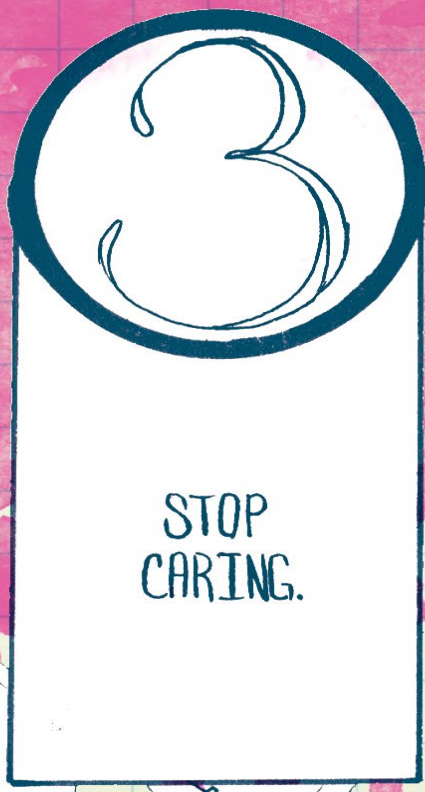
THE CYCLE BEGINS.



2

CHOOSE
SLEEP OVER
WORK.



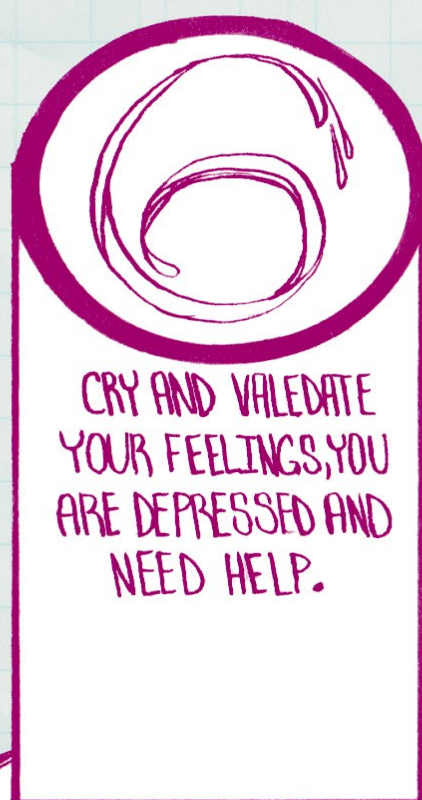




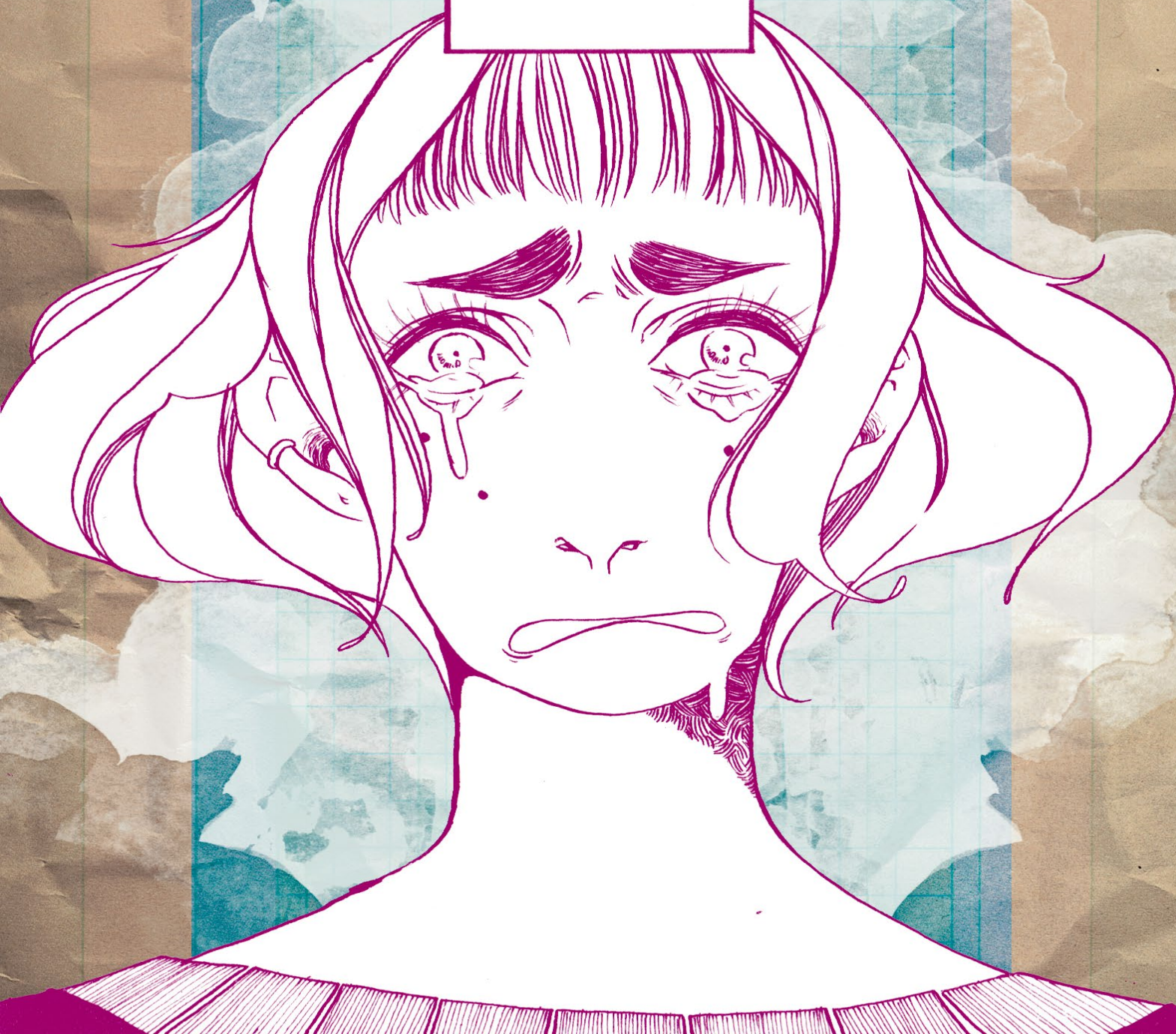


CONTEMPLATE
SUICIDE.





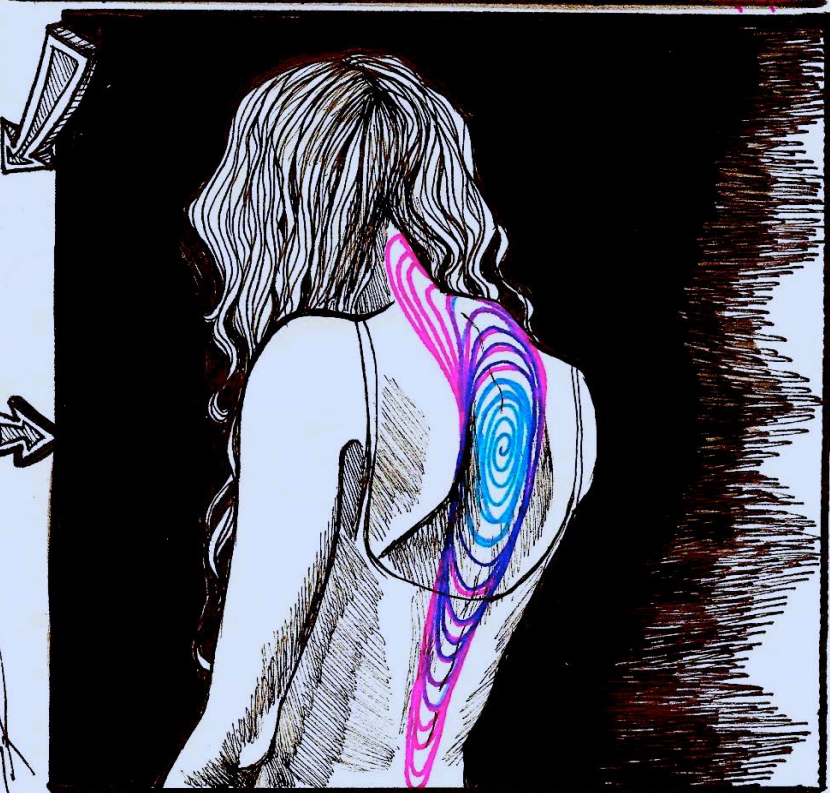
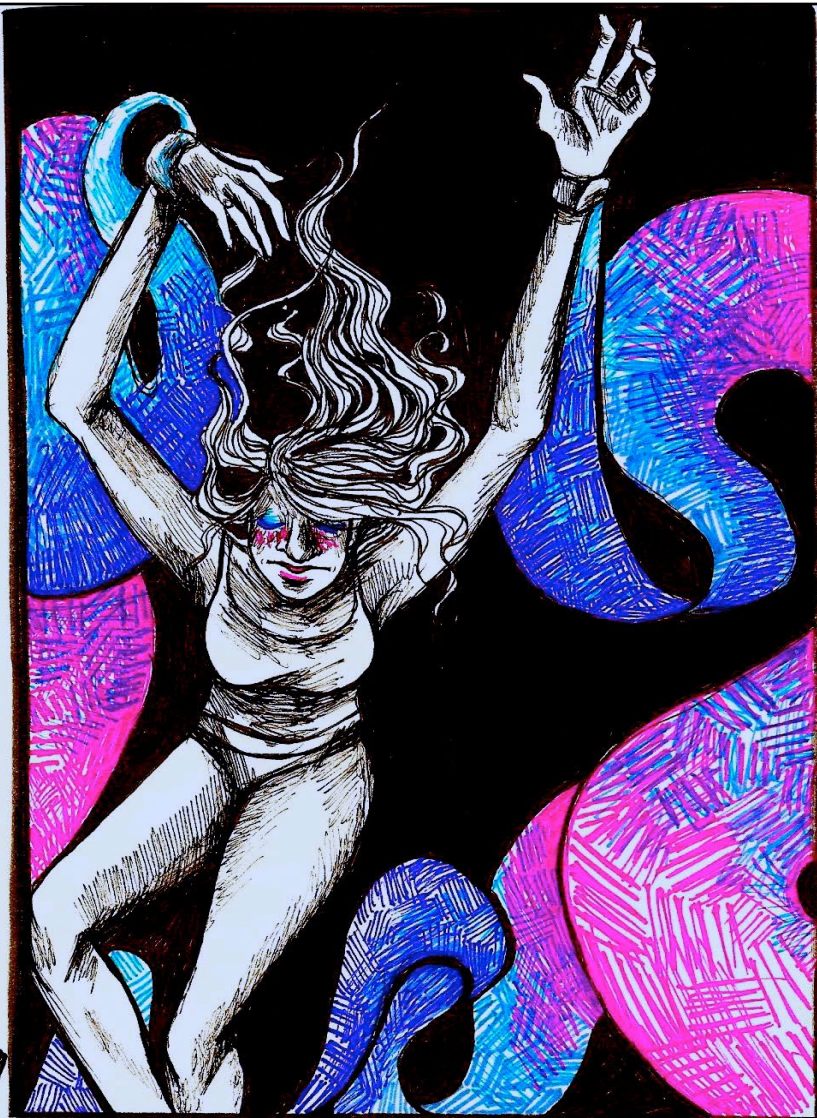
CRY AND VALEDATE
YOUR FEELINGS, YOU
ARE DEPRESSED AND
NEED HELP.

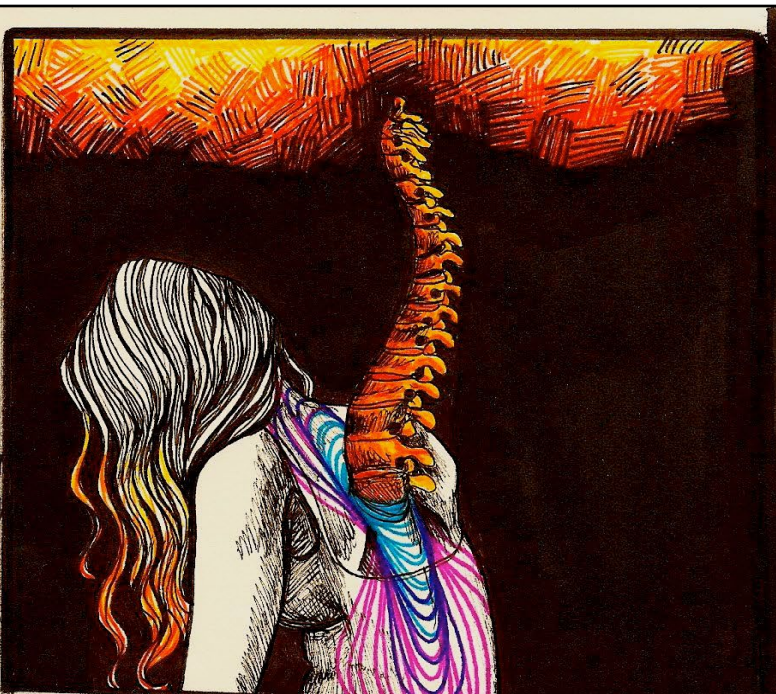
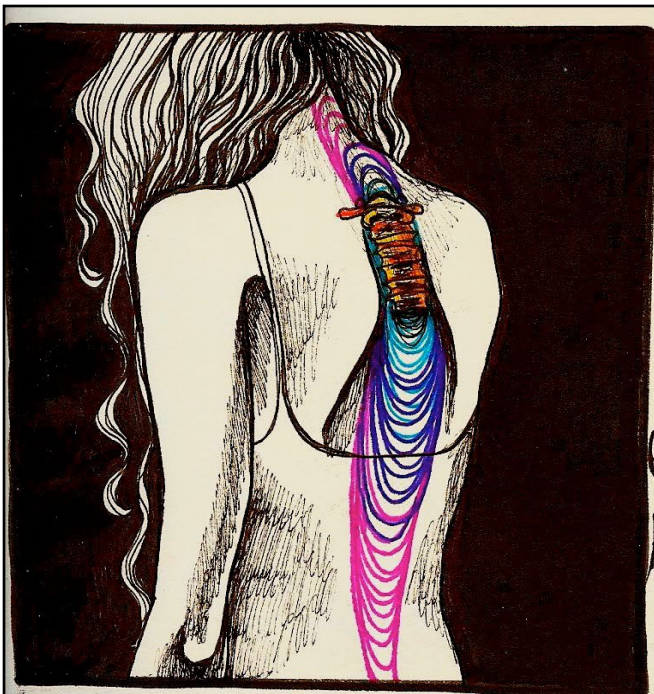


CALL ME CRAZY OR
SELFISH ALL YOU
GODDAMN WANT.



IF I PLAY THE
GAME...









**POSTING #9.3333333333333333999999999,
ACCESS CODE 69696969669696**

ANONYMOUS

**EVERYTHING I HAVE BECOME IS WITHOUT MEANING, VOICELESS, PRE-
POSTEROUS--**

---IN THE DARK OF ABSOLUTE SINCERITY, I CANNOT (CENSORED)-----

----WE ARE THE INGENIOUS MINDS OF FOOLISH MEN W---

(CENSORED)

(CENSORED)

(CENSORED)

**THEY ARE WATCHING! THEY CAN SEE EVERYTHING YOU THINK! THEY ARE THE ARCHITECTS
OF DESPAIR! THEY KEEP THE RICH RICH, THEY KEEP THE POOR POOR, THEY CREATE FALSE
REALITIES AND--**

--TRY NEW PEDIGREE DOG FOOD, IT'S SO GOOD THAT YOU'LL BE FIGHTING YOUR DOG FOR IT!--

**--WANT THE ULTIMATE ORGASM? BUY THE SUPER ORGASMIC DILDO, IT'S 14 INCHES OF PURE
HEAVEN---**

**--THEY MURDERED HER IN COLD BLOOD, THEY SHOT MY WIFE AND MY SON IN THE HEAD, HE WAS ONLY FOUR
YEARS OLD AND--**

(CENSORED) (CENSORED) (CENSORED)

GIMME A BREAK, GIMME A BREAK, BREAK ME OFF A PIECE OF THAT...

it musta been love but it's over now, it musta been good but I lost it so--

YOU ARE NOT THE FATHER!

ONE MIILLIIIIIOOOOON DOLLARS!!!!!!!!!!!!

**(Please don't let them kill me, I am trying to transmit to you through the
walls of this cell, I can only maintain my connection for so long and--**



DARK

[Hacked]

By James Murray

Raining outside sitting at the cafe table finishing my warm ham sandwich as my bottle of Coke was empty I rubbed my short black hair wearing light blue short coat, black shirt under it, black pants and blue boots.

I felt tired as I didn't get much sleep last night after my last job nearly went wrong just glad I managed to escape as I got a nice pay check after that job but half of what I got was gone for paying my damn rent bill! I really hated living in that apartment!

Then a silver and pink robot came over to me and said in a female voice, "Sir would you like another Coke or sandwich?" I turned my head over and said, "Coke please and I would like my bill." The robot said, "Alright sir." I got out my wallet as I paid the bill and left.

I got into my BMW M635 CSI old car but it ran well as I added a few goodies to it making it faster and keeping me a head of the law. I turned the key as the engine came to life then my GPS computer came on as I heard the auto voice say, "New Message Sir."

I moved my right hand over push the button as I looked on the screen as I saw a tall shiny building with a blue background I heard a deep male voice say, "This is Cyber-Genetics they are a top computer programmers and software designers." The screen then showed a helmet as it was silver with 3 white points and a black screen as I could see light green glow coming from it I then heard, "This is their newest toy called Dream Maker This new high tech toy allows the person to make dream worlds when they go to sleep or even hack into cyberspace if up graded."

I had feeling this is where I would come in as I heard, "I want you to steal it and upgrade it to hack into computers but test it out first before you drop it off. When we see that you have completed your mission you be having a nice big pay check." Then I saw on the screen \$750,550 then I heard, "Well you accept?" I looked at the screen as I did need the money I smiled and press yes as I saw on the GPS where I had to steal it. I chuckled and said, "Work time." I shifted the gear into Drive and press hard on the gas pedal burning rubber.

Once all geared it and waited to it was fully dark outside I went to work I parked my BMW down a few blocks I push down my cyber goggles as I flipped on the night vision I took out my AMT HardBaller Long Slide with laser aimer and silencer on it I pulled back on it as it was armed I was set.

I walked over to the side door reaching down on my belt I took out the auto lock gun with my left hand I flicked on the switch place it into the key hole when I saw the green light flash I squeezed the trigger as it unlocked the door I waited a bit till I saw a blue light flash I knew the alarm was turned off.

Once inside I looked at my left arm as I had a GPS wrist computer I saw where I was and where I had to go. This Dream Maker was on the 5th floor being watched by 5 guards no match for me.

Quietly moving upstairs as I flipped on the camera jammer so any video cameras I would pass by would freeze and won't show me. I saw a guard in front of me I waited till he moved away as I went over to the left down a long hallway. I looked over and saw an elevator this would help I went in and press the 5th floor button as the doors shut it started moving up.

When I got to the 5th floor I slowly came out looked at the GPS I would have to move up a bit then turn right and got up a little set of stairs to get this Dream Maker I went down the hallway and turned right as I saw the set of stairs but a guard was coming I waited till he came once he did I shot him in the head and moved upstairs.

I saw the 4 guards as the "Dream Maker" in a glass case with laser beams around it this was going to be easy to get at. I aimed the AMT Hard Baller at them shot them all as I shot 4 bullets into the glass case stand as I could hear a beeping sound I quickly went over I holstered my gun pulled a wire from the wrist computer hooked it into the glass case com-

puter I typed on the keys as I turned off the lasers and alarm I double checked then took off the glass case as I picked up "Dream Maker" I exit out of the building the way I came in as I got into my Bmw as I took off the cyber goggles I could hear an alarm going off I smiled I started up car and took off back home.

When I got home it started raining again. I turned on my lamp as I went to work on the Dream Maker I had my computer hocked into it as I unscrew the back covering I took out a few surrogate board's and added some new programs and software downloads into it last I put in a dark blue surrogate board with an black ball that had wires sticking out of it I hocked it up then place the screwed the back cover back on as it was working fine.

I smiled and said, "Ok time to test it out." I place the Dream Maker onto my head as I felt the screen was close to my eyes along with a few poke shocks onto of my head in front of my eyes I saw light green words and an female voice, "Load-ing." Then I heard, "Ready handsome?" I chuckled and said, "Oh I am!" I thought about hacking into News 6 studio as the news always board the living day lights out of me so I thought why not making it better!

Using my thoughts I saw through the black screen of cyberspace as it neon glowing flashing lights like out of the Tron movie. When I saw News 6 I said, "Enter." When I enter into News 6 software I smiled as I thought about adding an nude big breast chick dancing on the logo and playing an heavy metal song. I then saw News 6 program list using my thoughts I made the changes and added a few more things when the auto voice would say their names it would come out different. I chuckled enjoying this as this was really a fun toy to play with!

After testing out the new programs and software I was finished. I took off the helmet set it down next to my computer as I sent an email stating everything worked fine as I would drop it off first thing in the morning. I yawned and thought, "Time for bed." But when I looked at my bed an which could only felt one I signed as an handsome strong 19 year old like me didn't have an smoking hot chick to sleep with made me mad and top it off my dreams really sucked! I looked back at the helmet and thought, "Oh having an nice dream won't hurt."

I walked back over to my desk place the helmet back on as it I saw the loading screen in front of me I said, "Go to dream maker mode." Within sec's the menu came up as the female voice said, "What would you like handsome?" I smiled as I thought of having an smoking hot animal chick to sleep with I heard having sex with them was better than an human girl as the fur feels good against the skin.

Using my thoughts I made an strong 8 pack tiger chick with big boobs, tits and an big soft ass. She had an black and blue outline dragon tattoo on her back with 2 gold ear rings with light blue eyes I smiled and said, "Hello Sexy." I was going to name her that since she was sexy looking. I turned over to where my bed was and made it an king size bed as my room looked much more fancier then it did.

Once I was finished working on my dream I walked back over to bed with the screen up I rested me head onto the pillow as the screen came down I closed my eyes as I felt an warm feeling on top of my head as I went to sleep.

I was dreaming I was laying in my king size bed then I saw the tiger chick wearing an light blue dress I said, "Hey Sexy how was work?" She signed and said, "Very boarding." I said, "Aww my poor girl do you want to have some fun?" Sexy smiled as she took off the dress now naked she grinned and said, "I sure do handsome."

Sexy got on top of me as I wrapped my arms around her back her fur was very soft she then pressed her face close mine as we kissed our tongues touched she put her arms around my back as she rested her body on top of mine I felt her big breasts pressing against my chest it felt very good.

Sexy lying down on her back as I sucked on tit she moaned as I felt her hands rubbing my back I reach down to her pussy and started to finger it Sexy moaned louder and said, "Deeper!" I pushed my fingers moaning loading as I kissed her next then after fingering for a bit she had her orgasm as she let out some air I smiled and asked, "More?" Sexy said, "You bet handsome!"

She then got on top of me as she had her legs out pushed my cock into her pussy I placed my hands onto her big breasts as she started to move up and down. I thought, "Oh freaking crap! This feels great!" Sexy moaned loader as the bed was starting to shack.

I was also started to feeling a built up as I pressed my fingers harder onto her big breasts as she was moving faster then I shot out cum as Sexy stopped he was breathing heavy I sucked in air and Sexy asked, "You ok handsome?" I smiled and said, "You bet Sexy!" Sexy smiled and said, "Here let me clean you up." She moved over to cock and started licking it with her soft long tongue I moaned as her hands pressed hard against my chest I thought, "Best dream ever!" When Sexy

stopped she crawled back onto me and said, "I love you handsome." I smiled and said, "I love you too Sexy." We kissed as she fell asleep on top of me.

I woke up as my head felt funny I yawned slowly moving my arms but as I did my fingers felt wet with something sticky on them I moved my legs but I didn't feel my bed I lifted up the screen as I was laying on the floor and I saw blood. My jaw dropped open I went to get up but felt a sharp pain inside my head I yelled as I grabbed onto the wall with my fingers nails once standing I walked over to the desk as I saw my computer was keyboard was covered in blood too.

I said, "What the heck is happening?!" Suddenly the sharp pain came again as I could hear an woman laughing it sounded like Sexy but I thought, "Wait! Is that Sexy I'm hearing?! But she was in my dream she isn't real!" When I press my hands onto my head I realized the helmet was still on my head I thought, "I got to get it off!" But as I tried I felt shocking pain inside my brain as I screamed in pain I hit the wall I could feel sharp pokes inside my brain I yelled, "MAKE IT STOP!" I heard Sexy said, "Sorry handsome you were great last night but I be needing all those hacking skills you have. Hold still this won't take long."

Suddenly I felt something digging deeper inside my head I yelled in pain as I felt blood running down my nose I moved my body forward as I grabbed my AMT Hard Baller but as I did my finger moved pulling the trigger making it fire I thought, "She controlling me! How?!" I grabbed my gun with my left hand feeling more pain I yelled again as heard Sexy said, "Almost done handsome!" Blood was coming out of mouth I quickly aimed the gun to my face and pulled back on the trigger 5 times before it clicked.

My body hit the floor as blood came out of the bullet holes my hand let go of the gun but I was still breathing I thought, "Shouldn't I be dead?" I heard Sexy said, "You mean like this?" Suddenly my brain exploded as my face ripped a bit an pool of blood was around my body.

A few hours later 3 men wearing black and white suits came in holding Uzi IMI's found the hackers dead body an man came in wearing an green suit he looked down and said, "Poor kid. Come on take the helmet before the cops come!"

Man close to the hacker picked up the helmet as they exit the apartment through the back and got into a 71 white Lincoln Continental and drove off.

Making their way to the city heard on the radio someone hacked into News 6 made the auto voice the news caster names wrong and added an nude dance woman onto the news logo screen the man in green said, "Such a shame he made it work and he dead." Man beside him asked, "What killed?" Man in green said, "Heck if I know. Here past it need to see if it still works." The man green put the helmet on suddenly heard, "Hello handsome."

Few min's later an radio wave was being sent from the helmet as all systems were being controlled as machines were going on an murdering rampage Sexy giggled as more super power cyber beings like her would soon have control of the world.



Who You Are

((For Jessica))

by Bryan Howie

Dear Jessica,

You've seen me. Around the corner, dark and hidden, crouched down. Your eyes fell on me so many times, sliding over me like a bad taste washed away with clean water. The small flicker of my image in your periphery. The click of a camera. It's not your imagination. I'm there to ask you something.

It may seem strange but, dear Jessica, what is a body? It is not the person, is it? What is this we hold so dear, that we base our lives upon, pledge our lives to? What is it, except for a soft shell? These questions... dear Jessica, these questions.

You cannot answer. After all these years, I should know your answer, but that's the curse being married to somebody smarter than me. I never won an argument you didn't allow. Your answers always surprised; I can't solve this puzzle about bodies. But maybe one last apology and I'll wrap your delicate arms my head, bury my face into your cold shoulder, and rest. Maybe with my guilt spread open, you'll understand me better than I ever could.

You remember when you left, don't you? I said I didn't know what to do without you. I didn't know how to live.

And you, with that fire in your throat, spat back, "What? Is that some kind of threat? You going to kill yourself now, Keith? You want me to save you from yourself? You want to control me with death?"

"No," I said, hurt because that was exactly my aim.

"You did this," you said. "You fucked up. Not me. Damn it, Keith. Damn it. I didn't seduce a 17 year old student in my office. I didn't fuck her in that office on the goddamned couch. The couch my wife bought me. And I certainly wasn't the one stupid enough to get caught doing it, you asshole."

"I did," I admitted, trying hard to be honest for maybe the first time ever. Did you see me trying? Did you see that I always wanted to be honest?

"You did. You did," you said. Caught, I confessed. Judging, you handed down the verdict. I did it. Apologizing again would only bring back the fury of the moment. You know how I feel. I know you know, because even though I could never tell what you felt, you were always smarter than me.

You left me on a Sunday with two days to figure out how to win you back. You could have figured it out, but you always were smarter. Me in our bedroom with a stack of photo albums, flicking through the pages of you. I thought of only you. Your face, symmetrical and heart shaped, cheeks high and red. Blonde hair so fine as to turn white in the sun. Mutable blue eyes, nearly transparent to deep Prussian blue, dependent on mood. Your body. Fingers playing across my hands as we turned to the crowd at our wedding. Arms tight and muscular even after giving birth. Breasts that fell 2 cup sizes after breastfeeding, but still remained round lower on your chest.

You left with our daughter, with our car, with our luggage. Those damn bags we had bought for our honeymoon in Mexico - that trip we never took. I kept the pictures.

The photo album still a quarter empty.

The deadline to win you passed without me raising a finger. I brought out the camera to fill those empty pages of our photo album. You saw me. You know all about it. And I took you everywhere with me. A good luck charm, your picture in my pant's pocket, I went before the school board to plead my case. You weren't at my side, and I think that left me too reckless to stand on my own. I had no recourse but to act as guilty as I felt.

The college had no wiggle-room in these matters. A clear violation of policy. An intolerable indiscretion.

A picture in my pocket. Your voice inside my head. Your voice telling me not to be such a fuck-up. That soft, momentarily loving lilt in your voice as you told me to just be good. I tried, darling Jessica, I tried.

But the room was cold and inflectionless. Mr. Smeach, that straight-laced boyfucker, sat next to the President of the college, filling her ears with lies. Smeach, one crooked eye filled with loathing. We both know about him. He loves the cock. Craves it as Ponce de León craved his fabled fountain, with wetness that could restore youth and vitality. He was caught in his office, too. Caught with his pants down. He wasn't caught by a secretary that always had it out for him, but by a man willing to keep his mouth shut about what goes on between consenting adults. The young Indian boy was of age.

Smeach played his part. He reassured me that he would plead my case. He told me he was my ace-in-the-hole. That men, such as we, knew how to take care of each other.

Smeach has his own life and lies to protect. Can't blame him. I know how easy it is to fall into a lie and wear it as the truth.

Dismissed on administrative leave with pay for the remainder of my contract. 6 months of paid misery. There was still a chance they would rehire me after that, they told me. Not a chance in hell. You knew, and you were gone before I knew.

6 months to start a plan to get you back. Photographs.

Jessica, my angel, the next job was only part-time, but it sufficed. Night shift, long hours stretched from darkness to dawn. Cleaning the floor of those black streaks caused by lazily shuffled feet. Streaks you hated so much on our kitchen floor. I straightened the ties; I found the dress slacks in the middle of the circular hangers. Do you remember our daughter hiding in those? Every department store, Annie would go disappear into that cloth house and try on the clothes hanging as walls around her.

It was cute when she was six. Funny when she was ten. Indecent exposure at fifteen.

Even with my ten-percent employee discount, I couldn't afford to shop in this high-end department store. It was much like working at the college - a bunch of stuffed shirts, empty skirts, and plastic models begging to be redressed.

At night, to keep the loneliness away, I talked to you while pushing the floor-waxer. One adjustment I could never make. So many years arguing trained me to think in direct opposition to you, to think at you. Anticipating your response, my next statement ready to parry your point. Every sentence beginning with a magical word: Jessica.

Jessica, I thought, I am bored by my job. Jessica, I said, I miss you. Jessica, I confessed, there isn't anything in this world I want more than you. Jessica, I prayed, I can change; I have changed. I am a changed man, Jessica.

Seven months of gainful employment and chastity before I finally called you. Every night was tiring, simple labor. Every morning was the exhausted sleep of a working man. I felt better than I ever had as a teacher, because for once, I was making a difference. The floors were clean, the clothing hung straight and true, and everything was in its place.

Do you remember the conversation, Jessica? I do. Sitting in a shitty hotel room, dried pizza on the bed next to me, trying to match your voice to a photo, I flipped through the pages of our albums as we talked, new pictures spread out on the mattress.

“What do you want?” Words meant to inflame me, I know, but I also knew the question was a sign of your weakness for me. I found a picture of you from college where you were hung over. Hair shorter, light blue eyes red rimmed, swollen lips, skin pale and tender. You asked about me. It wasn’t much, but it was something.

“I have a job,” I said.

“I don’t have time for this,” you answered.

“I miss you.”

“I’m hanging up, Keith.”

“I miss Annie,” I tried.

“You can see Annie whenever you like,” you said. “I won’t stop that. You haven’t bothered yet.” The picture of you at the coast, wind blowing sand into squinting, smiling eyes.

You said, “Maybe, Christ, I don’t know. Maybe it’s better that you haven’t bothered. Maybe you shouldn’t see her.”

“I want to,” I said. “I want to see you, too. I don’t want to not be a family. I can’t see her and not see you, Jessica. Please.”

“No,” you said. Then the sigh. Not just air escaping your lungs, or exasperation overwhelming you. It was a warning. In a picture, you were mad at me for some stupid joke I wouldn’t stop making. I don’t remember it anymore. But your full lips were drawn thin as you practically whistled a whine.

“Jessica?”

“Jessica?”

“Keith, forget it. I’m not seeing you.” A pause that lasted too long to be good news. “I’m seeing somebody.”

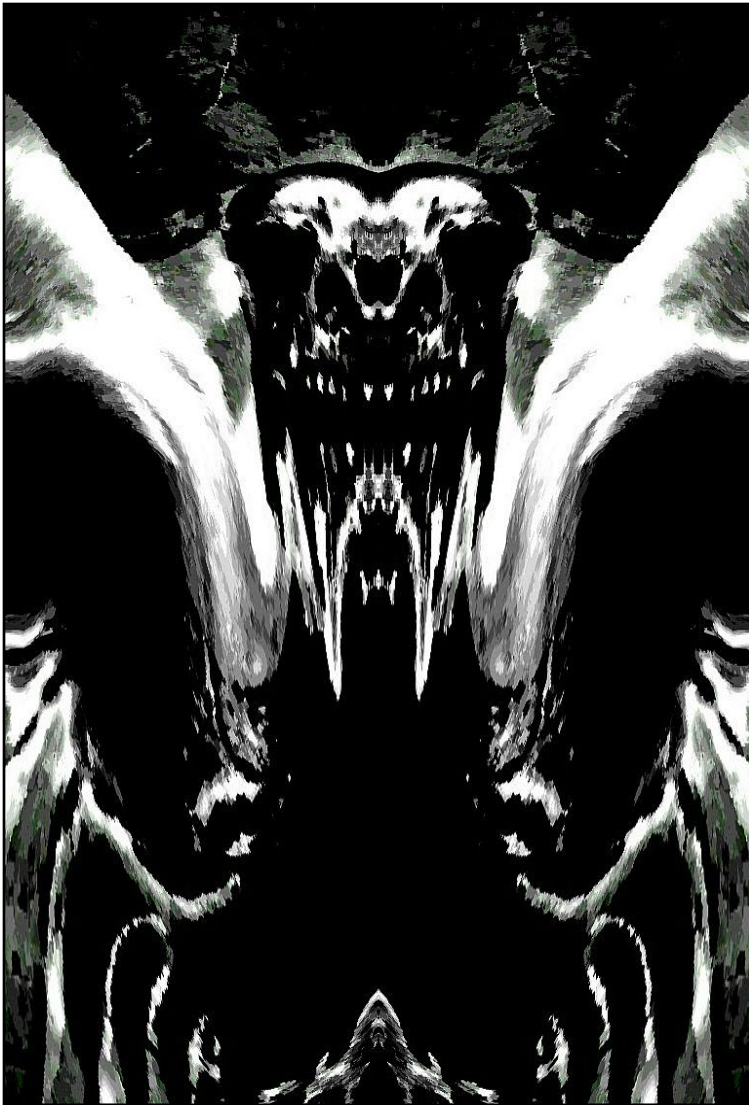
And the blow I never saw coming. Jessica, dear Jessica, didn’t you know how hard I tried to be better? Of course you did. Didn’t you know that all I wanted was my family? Yes. Did I hurt you so badly that you would never allow me back into your life?

I said, “Good for you.”

“I have to go,” you said. “Call your daughter. She misses you.”

I flipped the album to our wedding photos. You never looked happier.

My sweetest Jessica, the ache started in my stomach and crawled up into my shoulders, the feeling of my bones turning hollow and hot, the weakness crept into my thighs. The hurt of everything as my mind tried to grasp the pain and transmit it into the physical. You already know this. You were always smarter than me.



It was your name that hurt the most. Jessica. Jessica. My mind returning, repeating, circling your name. Your name hanging on my thoughts, my thoughts belonging to your face, your face flowing into that body, that body touching every word. Every word I spoke, spoken to you, Jessica.

You changed. I knew right then I'd need more photos, but I had to go to work. A man must walk himself to the gallows, up stairs he fears, he must stay strong. To work, to be good, and then to die.

And I was saved by the same name threatening to kill me. Jessica.

I swept the floor, clearing away the torn pieces of receipts, the strange wrappers and cigarette butts dragged in from the street, the lipstick and loose change dropped and lost and forgotten. The floors would shine. Pushing down. Overwaxing. The thought was in my head. Jessica. I can clean this. Jessica. I can make this right. Turn the world back into an orderly, clean thing.

This messy store, I sanitized it like I would my body. The body, the strange thing in the mirror we ourselves. The body is not the person, Jessica. No more than a photo of you is you. The body just a costume. Was this body made for you, Jessica? Was yours made for me? Or was I a mistake on the

way to this new man? If the body is not the person, then was your person gone along with your body? Or did your person, the Jessica I knew, belong inside of me, with me? Were you different when we were not together - a different person entirely?

I don't know. I'm sure you do, but you aren't talking.

I considered the brain, the heart, the soul. All connected by blood. I thought I would kill myself, but I did not want my blood to bother others. Slitting my wrists or my throat or shooting myself was entirely too messy. Somebody would have to clean that up, and I was dedicated to putting the world back into a clean, orderly thing.

I would drown myself, I thought. A perfect picture in mind. The warm bath, the water slightly salty as I sunk my head beneath the surface and slowly let the water fill my mouth. The sucking in for air, finding only liquid. Letting it enter me, fill me. The solidness of it in my lungs.

My instinct would be to panic, but I would steady myself and suck in another wet breath. And in my fantasy, you would enter. You would walk slowly to my side, sweeping aside all those photographs scattered along the floor, kneeling at the tub, your hand brushing my wet hair away from my eyes. I would look through the waves, your face mirrored and broken, shifting with the ripples. I would say your name beneath the water, no air in my lungs to produce the sound, but only water vibrating against my vocal cords. I would say, "Jessica. Jessica. Jessica."

And you answered. I heard you. The voice, so soft and loving answering back to me in the empty store.

“Yes.”

“Jessica,” I repeated. My voice echoing in air.

“Yes,” you said. That small word - everything.

The dim lights did not reveal you, but there were a million places to hide in the store. I pushed aside a rack of dresses, looking in the hidden spaces. “Jessica?”

“Jessica?”

Slowly around the store, stalking, whispering your name. Waiting for the word to return to me, your name tinting the walls as I went, changing the color of the room, echoing. “Jessica?”

“Yes,” came the reply, so close to me.

The small glass stand, a rainbow of blouses spread open and draped across it. Above it, standing as a statue of some unknown Greek Goddess, staring not at me but above my head. Eyes of cornflower blue; blonde hair kissed with silver flakes that caught and magnified the dim light; skin of pink stained alabaster. Your eyes. Your hair. Your skin. Draped in a black silk negligee.



This impossible vision, this perfect likeness. Her beckoning lips did not part, but in the darkness of the store, she said, “Yes.”

I reached up to her, my fingers tracing your name on her silk. My fingers numbed by the intense sensations. I touched her hand, plastic and cold. She was hard, as was I. And I said, “Jessica.”

Again she answered, “Yes.”

Oh, my lovely Jessica, I know this does not explain my behavior. I know I let you down. I know the incident at the birthday party is beyond forgiveness. I know. I know. But somehow I hope you know better than me. You always surprise.

But it began as simply as a name; as complicated as an answer. The body is not the person, but inside that name was everything I wanted and needed, and inside that answer was more than I could ever hope for. Do you know, Jessica?

You took a chance and invited me to my daughter's, our daughter's, to Annie's sixteenth birthday party. You said, “Come.” You said I should be prepared to meet this other man. You said you missed me, but did not love me any more. You said I could be there, should be there, for our daughter. And I was. I was there for

Annie. I came for you.

Spring is always more beautiful because of the birth of our child. I remember the hospital, how the dawning light of morning broke through threatening thick rain clouds, and how the red of your cheeks and lips brightened in the sunlight. You, so like a leaf turning over to greet the rain, becoming somehow lighter and fuller. How the first rays of the first day of spring brought with them not just light, but life. Our daughter, Jessica. Magic.

“Sixteen and never been kissed,” I said to our daughter, on the back porch of my old house. She smiled at me, an angel’s smile, that soft, warm smile.

“You wish,” Annie said.

Teasing me, she asked me, “So, you get fired from your new job for sticking your dick where it doesn’t belong?”

She has your wit, Jessica. And your mouth. And, yes, I had been fired, but not for sticking my dick where it didn’t belong. Not exactly sticking. More like a failure to observe. A failure to clean up as well as I should have. Another failure of discretion.

Store closed-circuit security cameras and stains on dresses. Caught with my pants down again, I suppose, and no administrative leave to fall back on. Still, “No,” I said. “Everything’s fine, kiddo. Everything is going just swell.”

“Too bad,” she teased, tipping back against the porch railing and crossing her arms. Her friends pointed at me and laughed. Annie told me to not make a scene.

Your new boyfriend, how absurd the thought, introduced himself. He was not enough for you. His eyes were tired and the edges of his lips were friction burnt. He didn’t hold your hand at the mall.

I retreated from the porch into the house. Our house. My house. Once upon a time, Jessica, we shared this living room. We shared this couch. Once upon a time, we lay on it beneath blankets, rubbing against each other like teenagers too afraid to go all the way just yet. I sat on the couch and imagined your hands cold and hard and plastic.

It was not your body I loved the most. It was the person. But I can carry you around with me. I can invest you into another object.

I carried the part that matters with me, walking up our stairs, down our hall, into our bedroom. Beneath me, outside and unaware of life’s ups and downs, our Annie’s friends laughed and yelled. They threw water in cupped hands from the spigot. They called names and dared to cuss in slight whispered hollers. They burned red beneath the sun and red from shame. They danced and sang.

Our bed, the covers slightly opened like the wrapper on a candy bar, only just offering a sample of some sweet taste. The silk sheets, the expensive ones you loved so much that we bought three pairs. These, the silky light blue sheets that brought out the color in your body, the faint blue veins that hide beneath the hard skin of your breasts and the soft red glow of skin tender from friction. Those blue sheets, and above them, sitting in the center of the bed, a piñata for the children to smash.

At the doorway, my mind repeating your name, I came to see the place that had once been sacred now made profane by a new man. I came to see if it would hurt or heal. I came for no reason at all, except to be there. And when I saw those sheets and that papier-mâché donkey, I felt like I may have died, drowned without a drop of water, if not for a name.

“Jessica,” I whispered, and tears came to my eyes. I stepped forward, my feet heavy and loud on the hardwood floor. Your picture on the wall, you running away from the camera. “Jessica,” I said, a sigh.

“Jessica.”

I chewed the word, grinding my teeth and biting my tongue to spit it out. I fell to my knees in front of the bed, my head falling upon those blue sheets. My skin, sticking and hot. My breathing rising with my pulse. Something inside of me, something black and cold, pushed against my chest. That picture, your smile wild and dangerous. Staring at it until I was forced to close my eyes.

Reaching out for you, my hands searching an empty bed as my eyes focused only on the sadness of my mind. I felt the slippery silk, the thin comforter, the hard skin of the piñata. I pulled it to me, as a child clings to a stuffed animal, and cried against it. Shaking as my tears wetted the hardened paper.

The taste of it was the first thing I remember. The salty taste of skin. The smell of glue, something brackish and organic. My tongue touched my lips and the pungent musky scent was in my mouth. I licked, touching the skin. It was hard, but as I wetted it, my tongue caressed the paper, creating supple folds. Twisting the flesh of this toy into something more animal. Wet, giving, malleable.

I said your name again. I said it with a taste for flesh in my throat, with your face in my mind. I said it with the force it deserved. I said it with love, with longing, with sadness and joy. I pushed the piñata down, found it hard and wet against me. Then wet and yielding. I fumbled with my belt, freed myself from my pants. I forced myself into it.

And, “Yes,” you said. “Yes. Yes. Yes.”

“Jessica,” I said.

For, what is a body, my dearest Jessica? It is not the person. It is just a picture, a face we pretend to possess. What are you, but sweetness covered in skin? I pushed harder, with fierceness I did not feel capable of, with an eagerness to please that part of you that lives inside of me.

“Jessica,” I said.

“Yes?” you answered.

And that is how you found me.

Dear Jessica, I hope this gives you some idea of what happened, of how I feel. I wish this were more, but I know you already know more about it than I do. I know you know I am sorry for ruining the birthday party. Poor Annie, she should not have seen that. I still think maybe you shouldn’t have brought her with you to look for me. You were always smarter than me, and you must have known.

Perhaps you intended it as you did.

But here we are. Just me and you, that small part of you that I carry around with me. Sweet Jessica, that blonde, silver-flecked hair, those harsh clear blue eyes, blushing pale skin. I love you, dear Jessica. And that’s why I was following you.

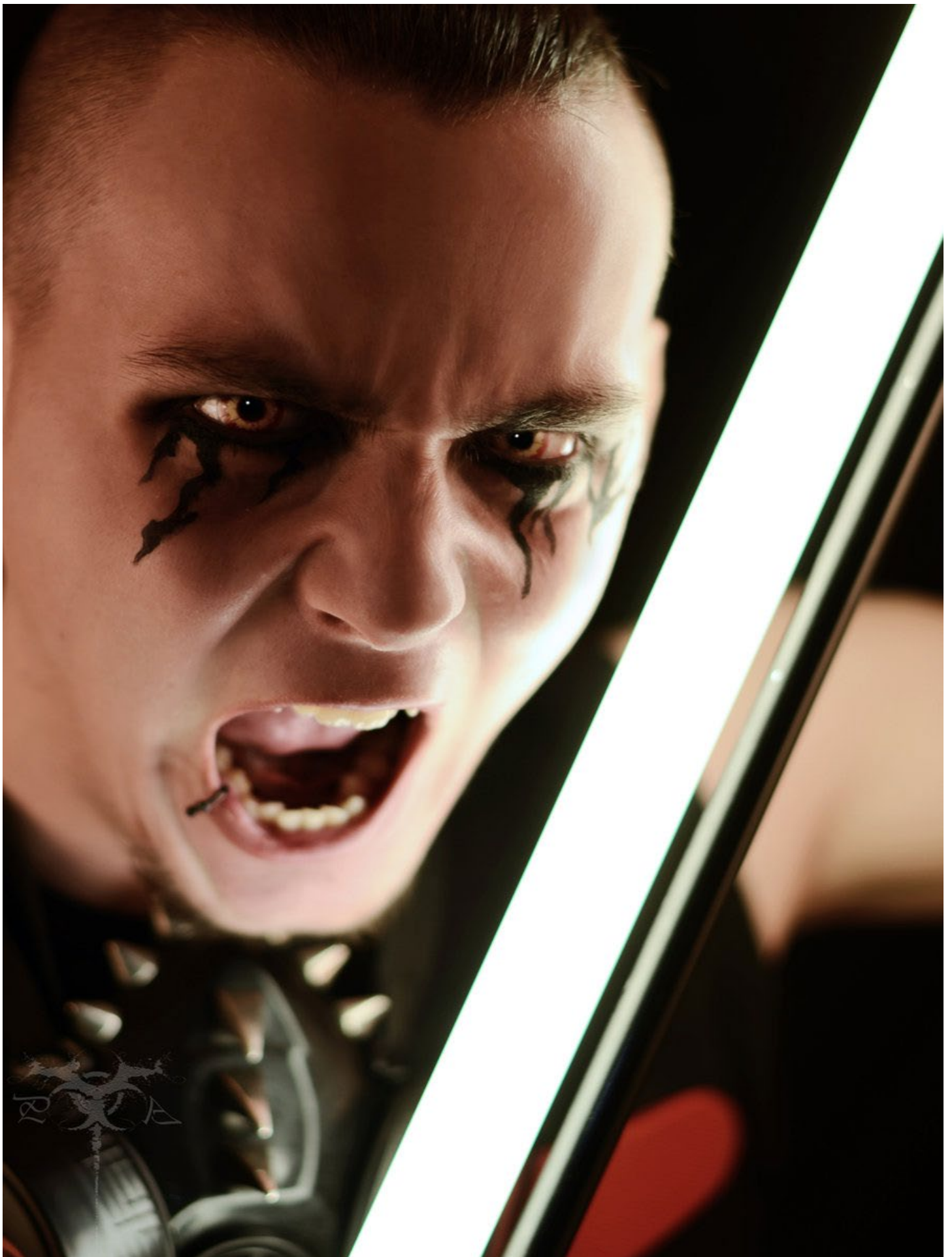
I know you sensed me. My face behind a camera. Click. Capturing different angles, different expressions, different yous. More than enough pictures for a computer to turn two dimensions into a three-dimensional image of your face. And all it took to bring you back to me, over two-thousand pictures and ten grand sent to a Japanese doll factory. And you’re here. Lifelike silicone skin, articulated skeleton, flexible joints. Lithium-ion rechargeable batteries, 100 hours between charges. Thermal skin with 4 levels of heat keeping my bed warm. Motors and servos, vibrating, pursing lips, a body that tremors at just the right moment. My Dutch wife. You, Jessica. A body, and the you I love. As much you as I want, Jessica.

The World of Cyberpunk



<http://pyrainearts.deviantart.com/>













JSHENDERSON.CARBONMADE.COM

<http://if-not-for-gravity.deviantart.com/>

GLOBAL ILLUMINATION

By Vas

Human excretions. Musty remnants of shed epidermis. The smell of rotting keratinocytes is diluted with excess carbon dioxide and water to conjure up an intolerable atmosphere I could drown in. I breath deep and hard, I breath deeper and harder until I convince my evolutionary reflexes to calm down. This isn't somewhere one could live in, I'm sure of it. I'm sure of it, yet I'm sure I'm wrong. He lived here. He found refuge. He eluded us. All because we were too damned civilised to guess otherwise.

Clare summons forensic wizards; I give myself the grand tour. Unbelievable. This can't even be called an apartment anymore; it's just one hole with a toilet and a sink built-in. I've got to hand it to him, though, the faggot sure can hide. He could let us scan the entire bloody Surface a hundred times over, but we wouldn't find this basement with anything short of napalm drops. They'd probably incinerate all evidence, though, and we don't want that, now do we?

Do we?

She throws me a flashlight and turns on her own. She looks around his cave, writing a fictional report in her head. I've always admired her efficiency, her perpetually calculative expression, the human facade over the perfect agent. You'd argue otherwise, you'd invert the mask and face, but nurture has taught me better than to delve into nature's assumptions. Figures that the perfect analyst is a failure as a person. Figures that all of her partners take a one-way trip to the crematorium once they start asking too much. Figures that I've been smart enough to keep my head on my shoulders.

"He must be desperate or a genius to resort to this," she verbalises my thoughts. "But there are conflicts." Indeed. One bed sheet. Too little junk food. One person's worth of spatial disturbance. "Our reports are mistaken. I'm gonna take it out on some--"

"Or maybe we are," I interrupt her. She turns back to me and points the flash on my chest. I can barely make out her inquiring gaze through the darkness. I shrug. "You're assuming this is one human's living material based on statistics born of formerly collected information. If our prey is who the reports say he is, past data will only inconvenience us."

"That is ridiculous; I understand your desire to take every statistic with a grain of salt, but--" Clare argues back.

"The reports themselves admit this is a non-standard case. He's been fooling Interpol for a few years now, and he's travelled around half the globe without so much as raising a flag. Surely, what this does raise is scepticism..." For one, he's fucking crazy. I dunno what his agenda is, but his profile indicates a smart lad, so, certainly, he must know his actions won't help towards anything. Well, anything other than his and various innocents' undoing, but still, no revolutionary would want that, right?

And this is where I fall into the pit I just told Clare to avoid; I'm raising axioms just cause I feel like it, because they follow my distorted view of reality. So when reality answers me with antinomies, I'm obviously going to ignore its calls. Keep this up, and I'll never catch him, since he'll always be hidden behind the cloak of subjective impossibility, having used Occam's razor to slice away needless dependencies. In a way, his acting without restrictions in a chase that presumes the existence thereof allows him to travel in a widely accepted as schizophrenic manner, while being perfectly logical to the world at large.

"You've got a point, Tim," she nods. And going a step further, we're assuming she's a hostage of his, but looking at it from a bottom-up perspective, there's a chance they're cooperating. The reports recognising their own fallacies, principle of explosion states literally everything is possible. Sociological paraconsistency is only practical if an object agrees with the convention; in all other cases, the object's abilities to conclude are freed and potentially clouded behind what we perceive as contradictions.

If this is the case, then Philip is indeed a genius. He's developed an impenetrable logical barrier around him, and by exploiting a series of unexpected reactions, he's been able to hide. He took established standards and swirled them round and round until the end result looked like something out of literary absurdity. I chuckle at the thought; well, of course! He's doing cryptography for a living, literally so. If it's true and they have developed sentience, they'd need someone capable of cracking a physical system, they'd need to crack society. He only took his tested-and-tried techniques, applied mathematical abstraction on top of them and re-specialised the result--ported the code, one could say--right into our living realm. Only a true multi-disciplinarian could ever pull that off.

The identification sorcerers arrive to make some sense out of this mess; it's futile and we all know it, but protocol won't have it any other way. Heisenberg will be the end of us; Philip understood what to leave behind, and by the time our analysis is finished, all we'll have figured out will be where he won't go. There's an ace up my sleeve, but I refuse to reveal it; his rationale has been reverse-engineered, but I'm afraid to sink myself into it.

A living being's choices are determined by the reward system; basic as it may be, the mesolimbic pathway and relevant neurotransmitters define every human's life values, from why they like cocoa leaves and fornication to why they must help their fellow man. The reward system is nothing but a control mechanism on top of a set of axioms; live on, perpetuate the species, survive. The basic, hard set is then expanded through experience into the soft set. This is a rather strange situation I'm in. In order to catch my prey, I'll have to bend my beliefs, I'll have to ignore the set system I've been so accustomed to.

But once you bite the forbidden fruit, you can never go back. I'm too scared; scared that if I fall to his level, I'll be a monster forever onwards. I don't want to do that. I want to remain human, I want my beliefs to stay where they are, I want to keep hope in my clutches.

This is why I'll have to resort to guesswork. Yes, that's it. Crossbreed Heisenberg and Murphy, then blow them up with trinitrotoluene. They say they built sentience, assume they have, assume it's with them, assume the little gal is it. What would one do with such an invention, what would a revolutionary possibly want? A nihilistic bastard like Philip, well, I say, take over the planet. How do you possibly take over a planet? Weapons. Lots and lots of motherfucking weapons. Who has weapons? The military. Who controls the military? N'Am-net. How do you crack N'Am-net? You can't. Why not? It's a closed network. Get a client device? Needs a traitor; let's say they have one. Where's the closest and most obscure node?

I leave Clare with the sorcerers and fetch my car keys; she'd laugh and scold me for my unrealistic guesstimations, but that's the best I can do. All those years of mathematics and higher-order logic, and hypotheses I've pulled out of my ass are all I can muster. I feel... ashamed, somewhat. I've failed professionally only to keep the glass doll of my personhood in one piece. So that I can look back at Clare when I retire and laugh back at her for the first time:

See? I made it, I fucking made it without sacrificing human happiness!

The sun is setting as I'm driving towards the coast at a hundred miles per hour; ever since the great demon that goes by Judas blew up the entire bloody Congress in the name of "change," martial law has enabled us to travel without regards for other drivers. I almost sound happy for the convenience. Maybe I'm secretly pleased by Judas' action. Maybe, behind this humanitarian pretence and official outfit, maybe I wanted the politicians dead, too.

Maybe my axioms are already falling apart.

A collapsing house not five hundred metres from the beach. I step out of the car; saline winds and dying seal-life hit me. I know this house. An old military engineer used to live here. I approach the wooden door and poke it open; it creaks. I can make out "Zeus" on what used to be a doorbell. I pull out my handgun and borrowed flashlight. I take a step; another creak. My breathing slows down as my heart beats faster; the antithesis strips my brain of oxygen. A room behind the stairs, an open door.

His is the domain of integrated circuits. There's a colossal shadow over the wired dungeon he calls a house, only penetrated by the selective light of tiny LEDs. A mainframe that'd make Tianhe-I shit its pants, reduced to a whinging mess of drama and sobs, and a sleeping cinematic monitor to boot. A single keyboard with no user. Fuck!

I realised my mistake a second too late. Something blunt hits my parietal bone, then it goes for my right arm. The confusion and pain are too much and I lose grip of my weapon. I'm thrown on the floor and punched in the stomach.

It hurts, it hurts so much!

The pain is enough to jolt me into wakefulness for just a second. My skull burns as if pure thermate is drilling its way into it, my right arm has acquired an extra joint and Philip is carving me a new asshole in my stomach's general area, but for some reason, I can't think about dying. Fight or flight should have me riding cloud nine by now, but there's a different mantra on infinite repeat inside my ears:

I was right I was right I was right I was right I was right I was right I WAS RIGHT!

Even crippled of proper logic and guided by gut and instincts, I was still right on, right where she would never be any time soon! I had proven myself superior to her, my employers, the State, Philip and the entire goddamn universe! I was here! I was standing in his last hiding place, the culmination of all his efforts throughout the years and was mere minutes away from blasting it all straight to Andromeda. I reach my left hand for my belt; I reach past Philip's arms swinging a crowbar wildly at me, I reach past my knife and right onto my transmitter.

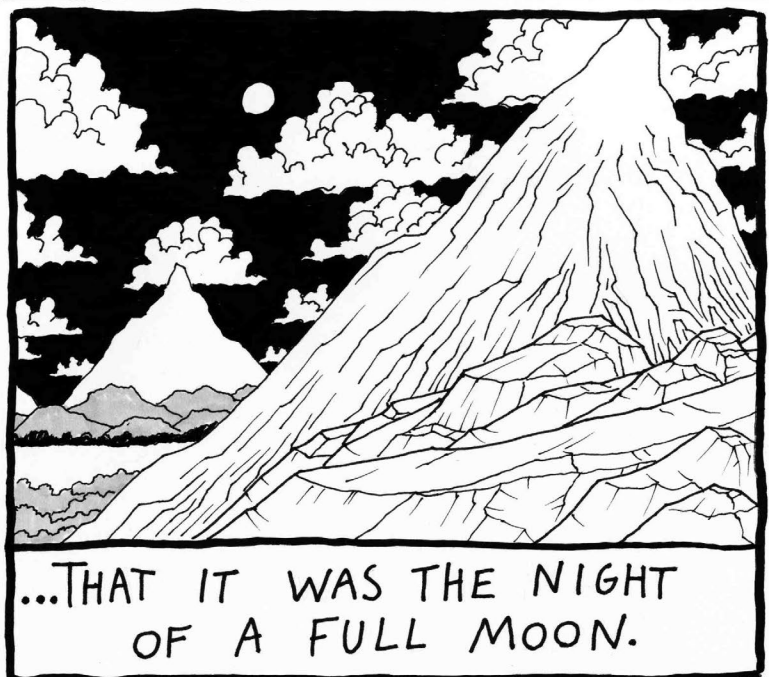
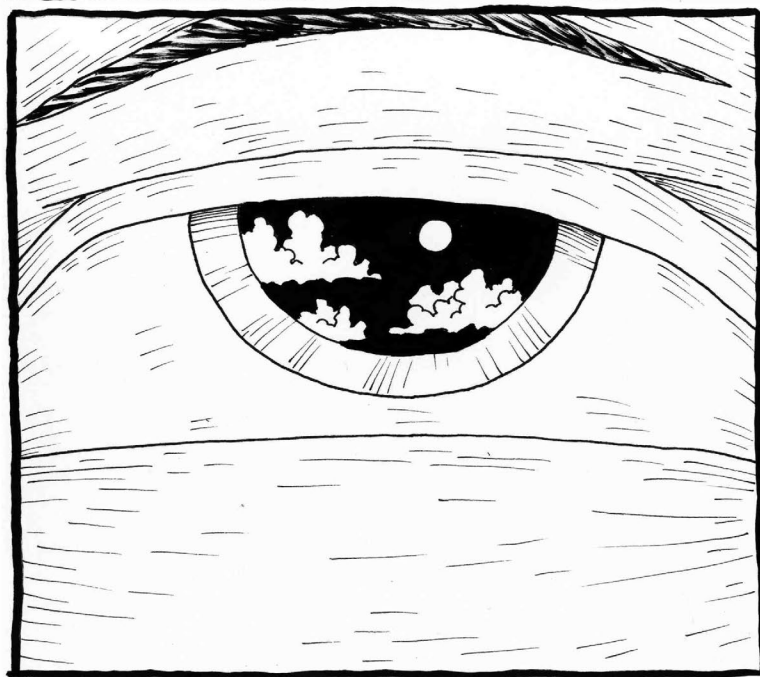
I don't care about living on. I just want Clare to know that I lived on long enough to achieve this.

I collect the last moles of ATP my body can afford into my legs and kick hard at his groin. He lets out a scream I didn't know human vocal chords could produce and stops his lustful carnage; he hugs his knees and casts away his long, brown hair dyed red with my blood, and that gives me enough time to roll away and look for the gun. I just need to get on my legs and--OH MY GOD WHY IS THIS THING FALLING OUT OF MY ABDOMEN? I try to pick up my falling guts by reflex as my legs give in from either pain or haemorrhage; I can feel the intestines writhe like glorified slugs infested with a peculiar hybrid between smallpox and leprosy--

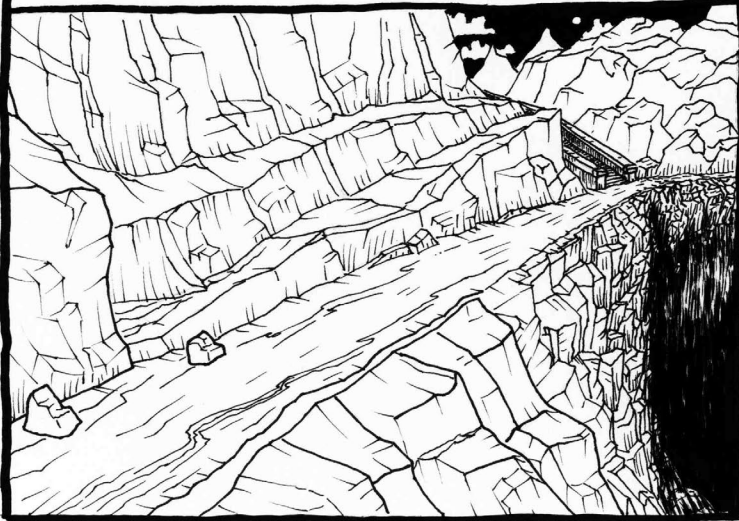
Philip has recovered and goes for my head; I lurch forward and kiss the floor, gradually crawling my way to the handgun. I take it in my relatively functional left hand and aim it at his general direction; he retaliates by slashing at the weapon in hopes of blocking and instead forces his crowbar's curved end through my palm. I try to scream something, but he must have torn one too many abdominal muscles for me to succeed in it. Finally tired of this tasteless brawl, he takes my handgun and points it at me; that's it, I'm done for, he'll kill me. I give up. Philip has bested me.

I lay my head back and try to close my eyes, try to remember some chant of forgiveness not sung in decades, try to make peace with the world. There's a young woman standing on top of the stairs. I can tell she's a woman, even with her head shaven and no immediately discernible breast growth; no man could have a figure so slim and elegant, and no human could have a presence of such tranquillity and absolute beauty.

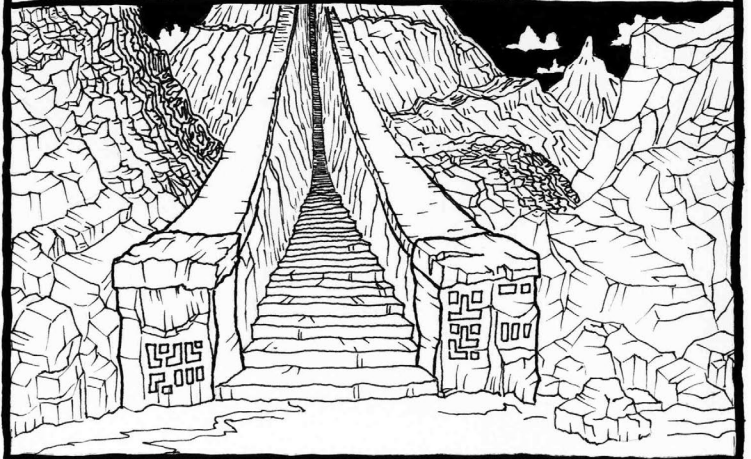
Yes, since Philip has killed me, she must be an angel. God has sent His messenger to take me away; me, of all people! This world... this world truly is kind, deep down.



AT THE END OF A NARROW
MOUNTAIN PASS...



.....ANCIENT STAIRS MADE OF
STONE AND CARVED WITH
STRANGE SYMBOLS...



...LEADING TO AN ANCIENT
MONASTERY.



THERE SAT A YOGI.



IT WAS DARK INSIDE.



HE WAS MEDITATING.
HE WAS IN A TRANCE.



IT WAS THEN THAT IT
OCCURED TO ME THAT HE
WAS DREAMING ME.



HIS TRANCE WAS MY REALITY.
WHEN HE WAKES UP...






THAT IS PRETTY
STRANGE.



I HAD A
STRANGE
DREAM
LAST NIGHT
Too.



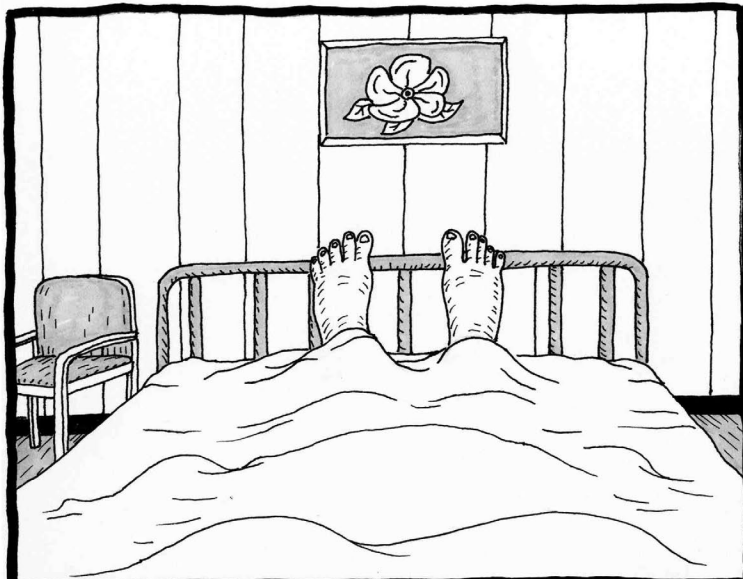
REALLY?
WHAT
ABOUT?



WELL...



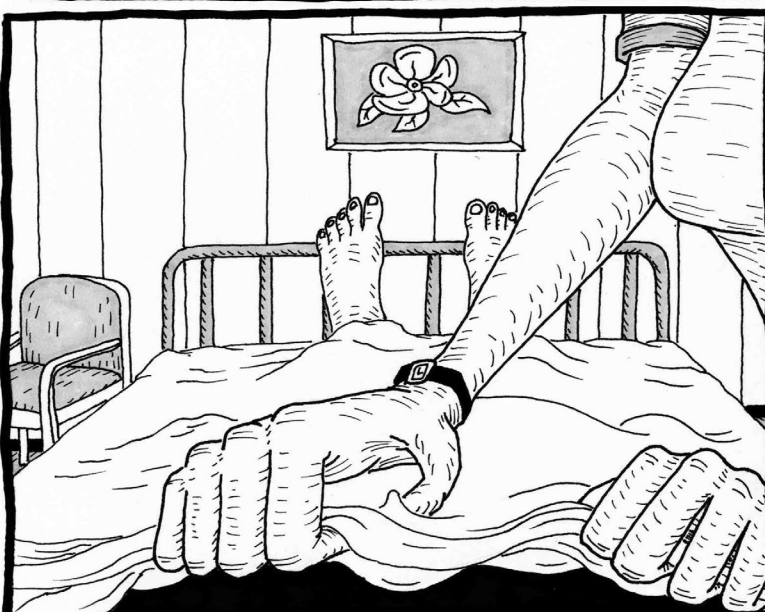
... I DREAMT THAT...



...I WAS IN A HOSPITAL BED.



THE NURSE CAME IN...



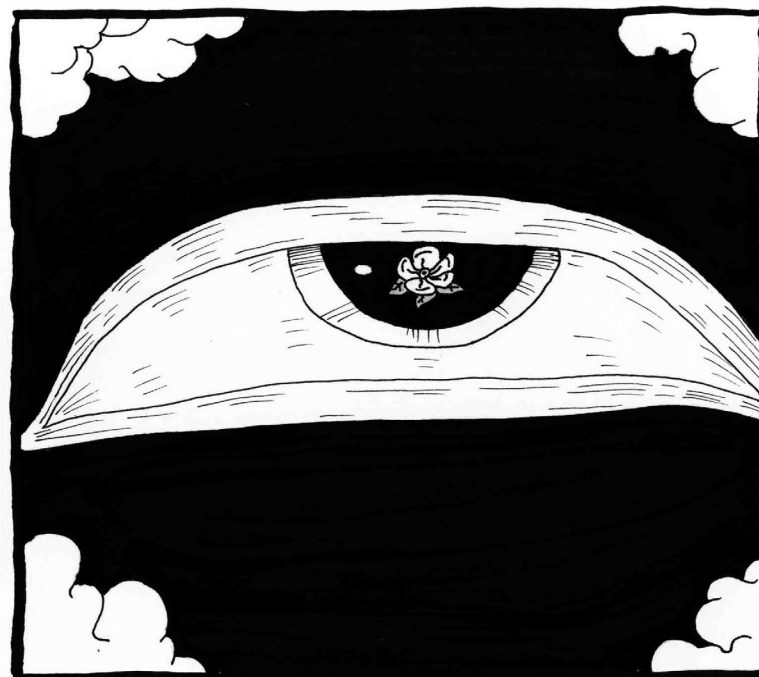
...AND PULLED THE SHEETS...

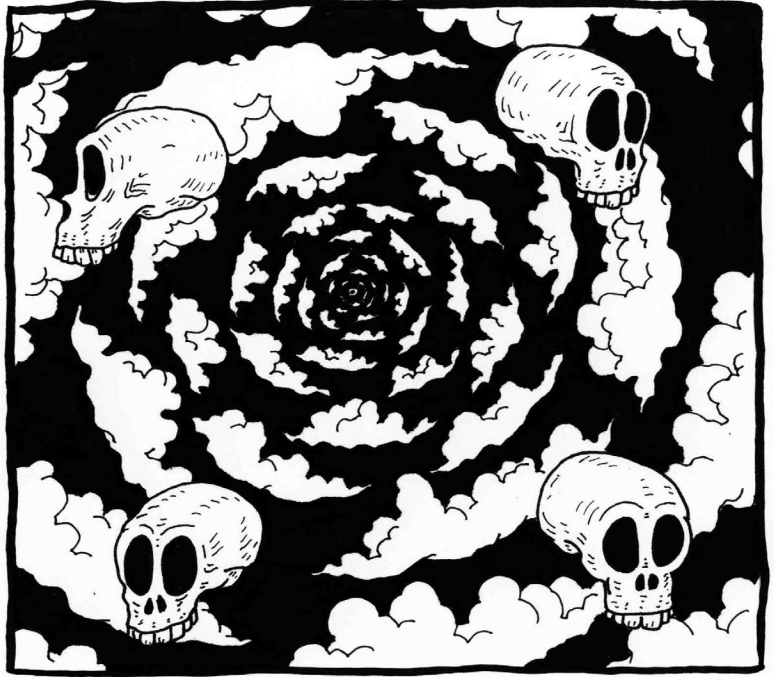
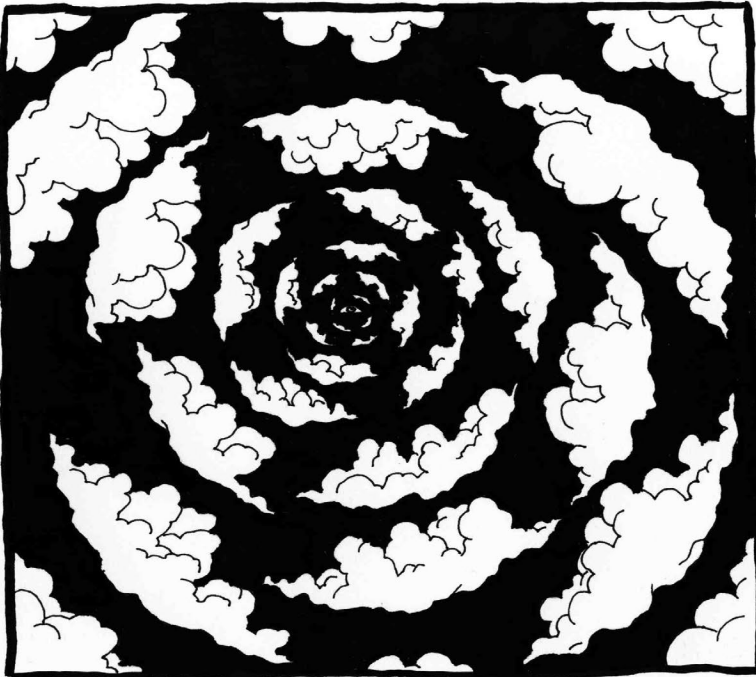
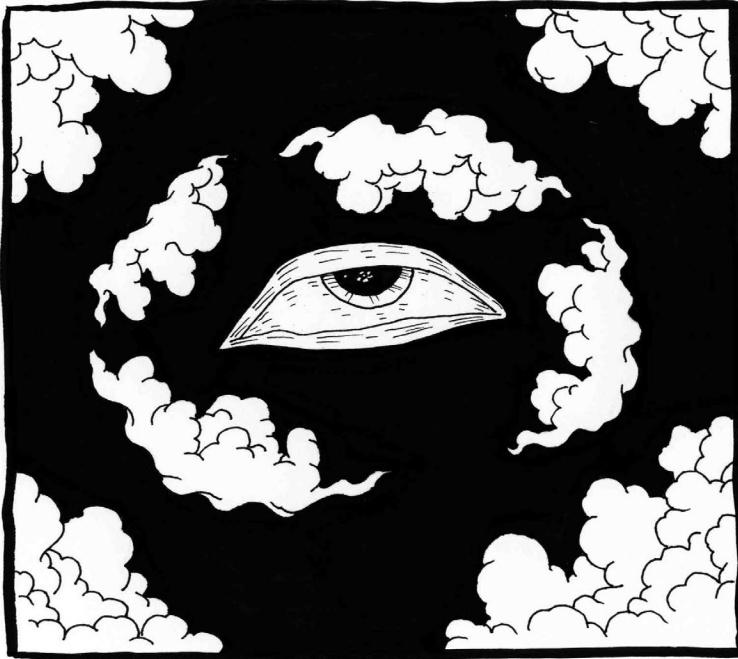


... OVER MY HEAD.



AND THEN THERE WAS LIGHT.







I RAN TOWARDS A CAVE TO HIDE FROM THAT MADNESS.



IT WAS DAMP. IT WAS WARM.



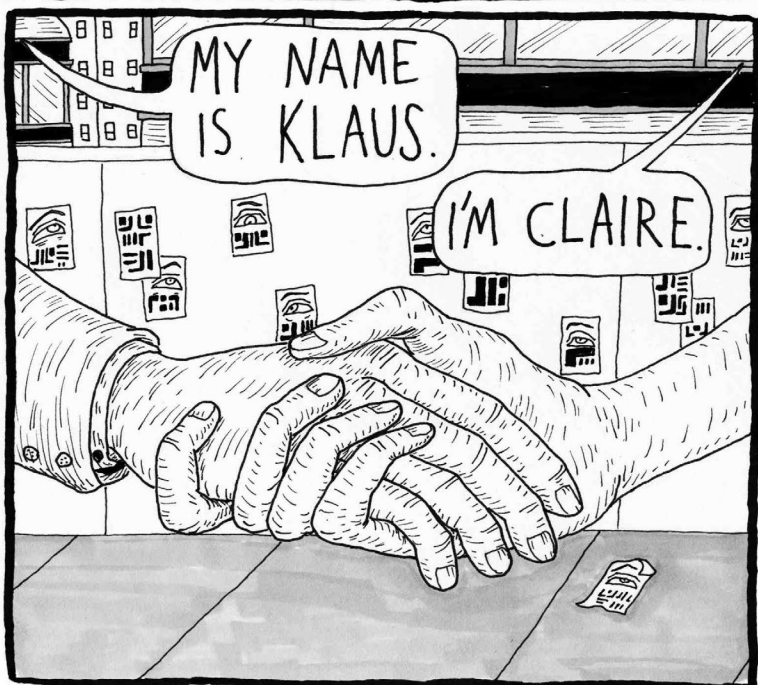
AND IT WAS DARK.



AND
THEN
WHAT
HAPPENED
?

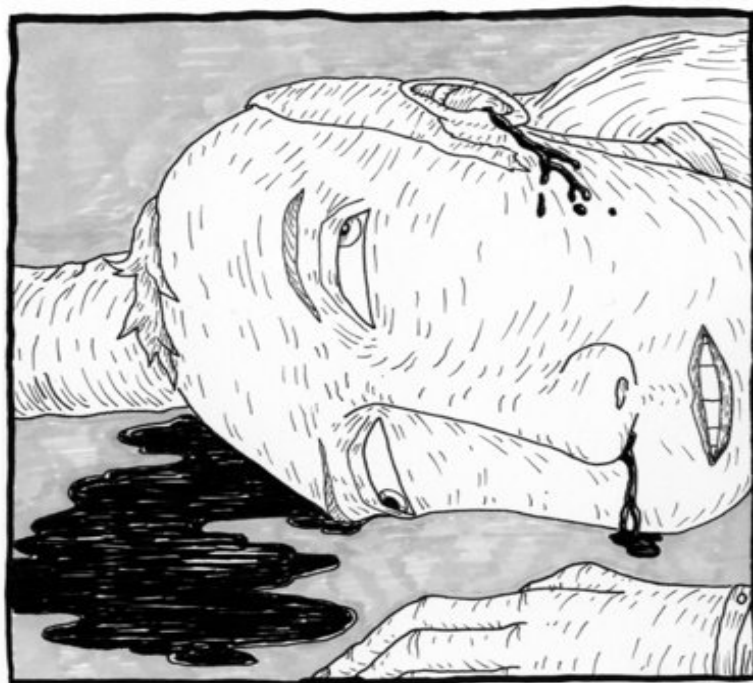
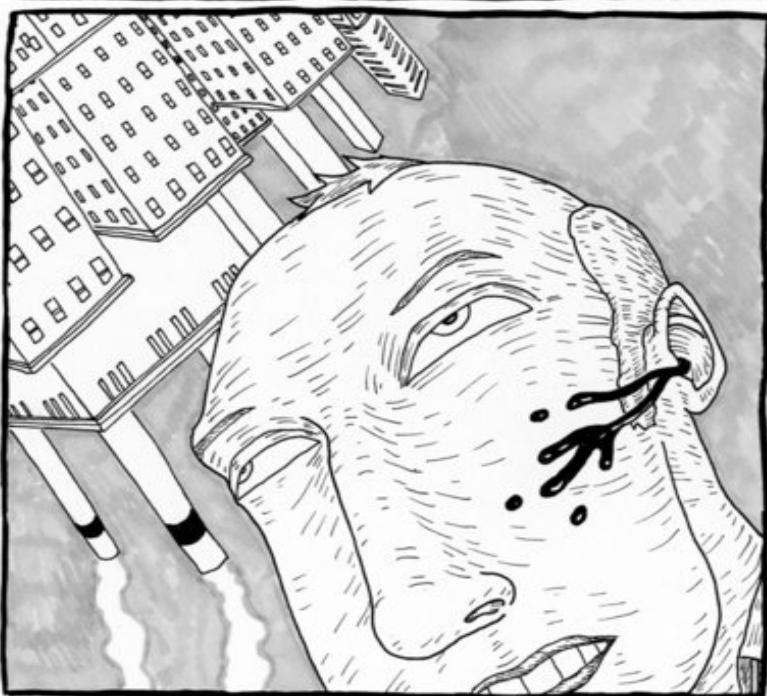
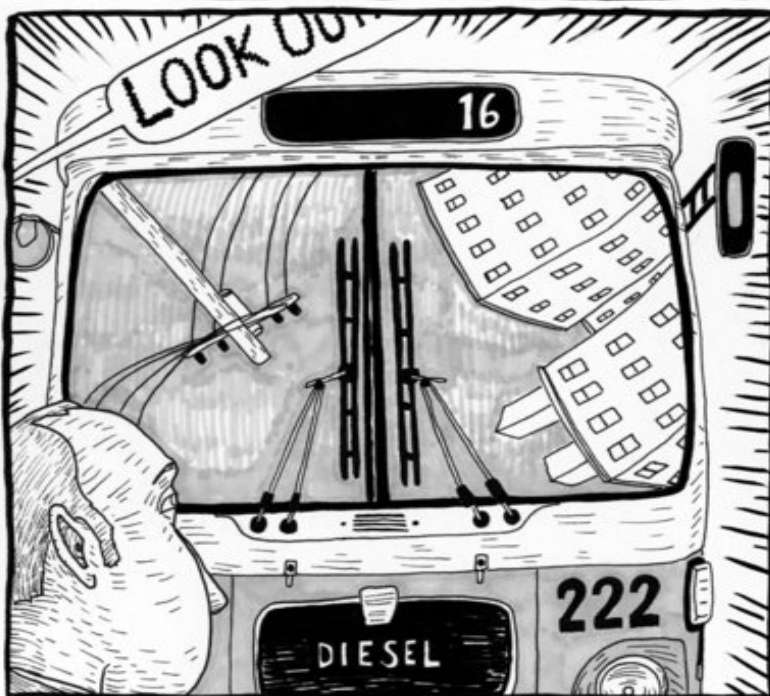


I HAD AN
ORGASM
AND THEN
I WOKE UP.



MY NAME
IS KLAUS.

I'M CLAIRE.



THIS PAGE IS NOT BLANK

CAN YOU SEE ME

I CAN SEE YOU

I LIVE INSIDE YOUR MIND



TOP TEN SCI-FI MOVIES OF ALL TIME

BY MIZ DESHANNON

Science Fiction – a favourite for film-makers and goes since the turn of the last century, from ground-breaking artistically mesmerising Georges Melies' A Trip to the Moon (1902) and Fritz Lang's 'Metropolis' (1927), to the kitsch 50s B-movies with their plastic monsters and over-dramatic women, right through to (now becoming bizarre) science-fiction action films like the 'Predator' franchise. Every decade since the beginning of time, well, moving picture time, has had it's obsession with science fiction, projecting speculative ideas on the unknown, depictions of the future, extra-terrestrial life forms and bending the laws of physics on time travel, and often tackling political or social issues at the same time. Following the cyberpunk trend, turn-of-the-century science fiction tackled technological issues which may sound standard but have actually been fairly mind-boggling, with computers and software development playing an increasingly important role in films seeing offerings like 'The Matrix' and 'Total Recall' with highly enhanced production and sophisticated visual effects.

The genre of science fiction itself has been bent somewhat, with confusion over it's exact definition, a lot of films touching on space fiction, absolute fantasy and conspiracy theory too much, rather than remembering the term is science fiction; we should be thinking 'Frankenstein', 'War Of The Worlds' and 'Terminator'. Apparently even the Ninja Turtles comes under science fiction though, as a film tackling scientific conditions and alien life forms, so it's easy to see how the genre became so broad.

When assessing what is a good sci-fi film, it's important to look at some things – the importance to progression of sci-fi in the public eye, films that have defined their eras, entertainment value, films that have something to say about humanity 50-100 years from now. Also great production design, maybe not too much CGI, and enough imagination for the film to remain relatively scientifically justifiable (no pun intended). But it really depends on your taste – horror and thriller, fast-paced, arty, factual, slightly humorous or plain gory. Sci-fi nerds are aware of increased ignorance by film-making to the standards of scientific plausibility, the adherence to scientific fact and the lean towards films being purely fiction, with some vague kind of a futuristic or otherworldly slant – magic or occult and a bit of mysticism thrown in – yet still wanting the cool and intelligent label of being sci-fi. Well that just doesn't cut it for our panel of experts.

We asked a few nerds, using that term in the nicest possible way, to give us their feedback on their favourite science fiction films of all time. Ranging from a UFO expert to a physics specialist to a creative set designer, and a multitude of equally bizarre and exotic life-styles in between, they've given us their opinions, and we rounded the eclectic lot up into a well-balanced and barely opinionated Top Ten Of All Time. That's actual time, as we know it, no future predictions or opinions allowed.

1. Blade Runner (1982)

So as expected by some, it'd appear that the box office smash that is Ridley Scott's dystopian action film is top of the list. A blend of science fiction and noir detective fiction, the critics loved it and it's unique postmodern production design became hugely influential within the sci-fi genre, seeing the film being a template for innumerable films that followed, and with it gaining a significant cult following.

2. Aliens (1986)

Full of big-budget special effects, swiftly paced action, and a distinct feminist subtext from writer/director James Cameron, this is a sequel to be reckoned with. Blockbusting figures at the box office and a seven-time Oscar nominee, Sigourney Weaver returned as Ellen Ripley, the last surviving crew member of a spaceship destroyed during an attack by a virtually unbeatable, amazingly vicious (and also female) alien life form. A really exciting film.

You can find her on Twitter at: @DeShannon

3. The Matrix (1999)

This film makes it glaringly obvious the effect that our increased reliance on technology could have on controlling and distorting our futures. Keanu Reeves plays Thomas, a hacker (alias; Neo), who through this activity meets Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne), who has the interesting news that none of what's going on around him is real. They are actually 200 years in the future of what Thomas thinks, and his reality is a massive artificial intelligence system. The film contains some fairly good martial arts too, and an array of rubber outfits.

4. Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977)

Mystery suspense action adventure from Steven Spielberg, about a random group of people who attempt to make contact with aliens. Science fiction in practice, there are no super-humans or vast amounts of unnecessary special effects, the film simply shows a man's obsession developing into him meeting like-minded individuals, making their own language to talk to the other-worldly beings, and being put to the test when a band of government



researchers and underground UFO enthusiasts join them.

5. Serenity (2005)

An outer-space adventure where a band of renegades get in some trouble in the 26th Century military-controlled galaxy. Adapted from the TV series 'Firefly', there are various groups scattered and inhabiting space post-civil war, and the film sees crime, violence, cannibalism and psychic powers fuel a host of characters whose personalities melt together in this modern cult 'little people vs the world' classic.

6. Tron (1982)

One of the earliest feature films to reflect the video-game craze of the 1980s, Disney's (yes, Disney...) Tron stars Jeff Bridges as computer programmer Kevin Flynn, who becomes part of the very game that he's programming. Flynn's principal antagonist is his glory-grabbing boss, Ed Dillinger (David Warner), who likewise metamorphoses into a video-game character. Though antiquated by the CGI that emerged in the 1990s, Tron represents the last word in special effects, and is loved because of it.

7. 2001 - A Space Odyssey (1968)

One of the most interesting and influential of all sci-fi films it's a surprise this hasn't come in higher. Stanley Kubrick's 2001 is a mind-bending but poetic meditation on the folly and ingenuity of mankind, and gets quite controversial at times. Pushing the boundaries of narrative and special effects, the film is based on Arthur C. Clarke's story The Sentinel, with some Strauss thrown in on the soundtrack for increased drama. Characters include a group of hominids, a monolith alien, HAL 9000 the spaceship's computer and a variety of humans. You'll either get it or you won't.

8. Alien (1979)

Carrying the spine-chilling catchphrase "In space, no one can hear you scream...", the first in the Alien franchise is apparently not as well-received as its sequel. Mystery, suspense and horror on a space ship, a close encounter of the third kind becomes a Jaws-style nightmare when on the way home from a mission the Nostromo's crew is woken up from hibernation to answer a distress signal. After the discovery of a bizarre pod-field, and some face-hugging creatures wiping out most of those alive alongside the acid-blooded incubus Alien, well, the rest is obvious.

9. Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope (1977)

Everyone loves a good Star Wars film, and everyone has a soft-spot for Darth Vader. This was the first of George Lucas' series, but since the prequel trilogy came about is no 4th. Labelled as "a fairytale for the ages" by one of our experts, this is a legendarily expansive and ambitious start to the sci-fi saga – George Lucas opened our eyes to the possibilities of blockbuster filmmaking and things have never been the same since.

10. Akira (1988)

Some anime snuck in, but you can't deny that these niche Manga books have become hugely popular and very influential post-apocalyptic hero stories. This is one of the best examples, hence it being chosen, and based on the book by Katsuhiro Otomo the story is set in Neo-Tokyo, with a motorcycle gang, robot-like police, and a hero who discovers he has telekinetic power. It's as good as some of the other 9 actually, despite coming last.

Well after all that fussing about story-telling, quality control and scientific justification, we've been left with a bounty of good old aliens taking up most of the chart. Flippancy aside, that's a pretty good Top Ten, a good range of earth-bound and space-age films, and even some anime making it in at the end. Some which just missed the Top Ten are;

Forbidden Planet (1956)

Metropolis (1927)

Solaris (1972)

The Fifth Element (1997)

The Time Machine (1960)

Independence Day (1996)

E.T (1982)

Contact (1997)

Logan's Run (1976)

Predator (1987)

The Thing (1982)

The Abyss (1989)

Silent Running (1972)

Moon (2009)

Event Horizon (1997)

...As they only got one vote each, we haven't put them in any kind of order of favour, but they're all well worth a look, for great production, story-telling, issues and vision. And beware of the year of production, there are some big differences in modern versions of fantastic books and re-makes for keeping the sci-fi real. If you know what we mean.

MDS



THE AFTERLIFE MIXER

BY DWG

Salvador Dali was waiting for God to arrive in a plastic yellow egg car with spider legs for wheels but the bastard never showed up. It was always like this, every year God was listed as the guest speaker but something always came up. The seraphim kept apologizing to the guests but everyone was pissed. Edgar Allan Poe dunked his head in the punchbowl while Van Gogh stood at the podium with his chest still bleeding and the bullet lodged in it that the doctors had never removed in life. Behind him, there was an aura of electric blue waves shimmering, they were so bright that it was hard to look at him head-on. Charles Dickens held Gogh's ear in his pocket as collateral for their last poker bet. Across the room, Hemingway was having a drink with Jane Austen and Emily Dickenson but Austen said she wasn't going to fuck the minimalist.

"I heard he is minimal in more ways than one," Jane Austen said.

Emily gave a shy, tittering laugh. Louisa May Alcott stared at them, then tried to attempt conversation but they ignored her.

Just then a drunken Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton stumbled into the room cackling.

Then Van Gogh began, "We are here tonight for the 267th Annual Afterlife Artist Awards. If you were invited tonight from whatever corner of the afterlife you inhabit or whatever dimension you have been banished to, it is because you made such a large impression on the world that you have still not been forgotten. As long as your books are read, your movies are watched, your music is listened to, your paintings are seen, you matter. Tonight we are here to give the lifetime achievement award to a man whose works have been remembered for centuries and will probably be taught in high school English classes until the end of time. Join me in congratulating Shakespeare."

A small rather rotund man stepped up onto the stage, he had crossed eyes, a long bulbous nose and one of his arms was shorter than the other.

"I had no idea he was that ugly," Sylvia said.

"Oh yeah," Anne whispered, "Butt ugly."

Shakespeare started to speak and Sylvia's attention wandered off. She glared at Emily Dickenson who was sitting by herself now as Jane Austen had finally given in to Hemingway's advances and was fucking Papa in the backroom.

"Because I could not stop for death, he kindly stopped for me!" Sylvia mocked.

Soon Anne Sexton joined in and they started to laugh.

"The carriage held but just ourselves and immortality!"

They started snickering again.

Emily gave them a dirty look, then flipped them the finger.

They only laughed louder.

Salvador stood at the door, tweaking the tips of his infamous moustache and waited for his beloved Gala. It had been months since he had seen her, creating alternative realities was busy work and the seraphim worked him ragged. He had created so many worlds, he could not remember which one he had come from anymore.

"Can you believe this crap?" Salinger came over and spoke to him, "Bunch of phonies if you ask me. Awards in the after-life, we are dead, who gives a shit if people remember us? It's all just words anyhow. At least what you did, those images stay in people's minds. Can you understand a word I'm saying?"

"Yes," Salvador said, "there are no language barriers anymore. The seraphim gave me the touch of babble, I can under-

stand any language across time and space.”

“Nice,” Salinger said, “So no offense but isn’t this awards ceremony specifically for writers. How come you are here?”

“I was asked to observe. Plus my wife is coming and she wanted to meet William Faulkner and Thoreau, she is a big fan.”

Dylan Thomas was on stage now introducing most prolific poet and when he said T.S. Elliot, Sylvia and Anne stood up in protest, “That’s bullshit!”

Van Gogh walked over to Dickens, “I’m tired of fucking around, I want my ear back.”

“Then you will announce the winner just like I said,” Dickens grinned.

Van Gogh returned to the stage and prepared to announce Most Influential Writer of the 1800’s and who made a major impact on 20th Century literature.

He announced the candidates slowly.

Gogh saw Twain in the audience next to the placard that read Samuel Clemens, he was sitting quite self-satisfied with a top hat on and chewing on a toothpick. He had won in this category for the past 100 years. Van opened up the envelope and then shuddered as he saw Twain’s name. Dickens stared at him and pulled the ear out of his pocket and kissed it.

“Charles Dickens!” he shouted.

Twain fell out of his chair, “Now wait just a goddamn minute! I demand to see the ballot!”

“All votes are final and determined by the dreamers of the collective unconsciousness,” Van Gogh said and hid the envelope in his pocket.

Twain tackled him to the ground.

“Show me the damn envelope!”

He pulled it out of Van’s back pocket.

“Liar! I knew I won! This asshole just wrote for word count, I wrote because it mattered to me!”

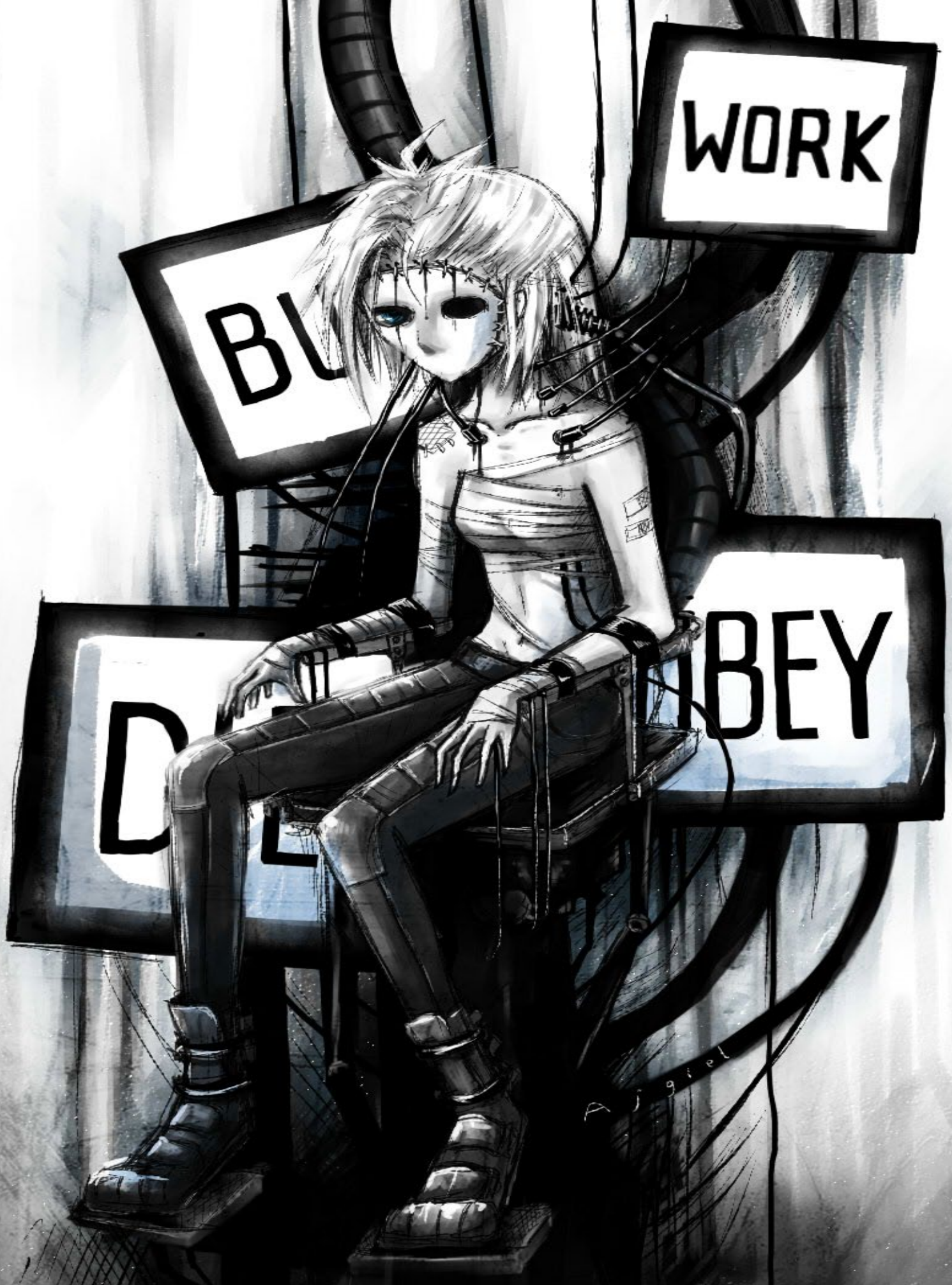
“Give me my ear back!” Van Gogh screamed and Dickens put it in his mouth and swallowed.

Just then across the room Gala stepped into the ballroom and Salvador’s eyes lit up. Then slowly the realization came over him as he saw who was on her arm. James Joyce whispered in her ear and she laughed playfully. Salvador’s eyes suddenly lit up with a strange magic.

“SALVADOR, NO!” a seraphim cried out.

Just then a giant elephant burst through the wall with spindly legs and sharp teeth. He ripped off Joyce’s head and ate it. Gala screamed and suddenly the clocks on the wall began to melt. The front door opened and everyone began screaming as they were sucked out into a pocket dimension.





TRANSMITTED LIFE

BY ~STEPHAN/EACEVEDO

White death of Deadmen,
manufactured-mirror bones
rusted flesh and wiry matter splattered
with their black blood, unreal – look
who made them martyrs – part
of the collection,
carbons of each other
transcribed cache,
over and over
coma by the white light, prosthetics
dropping, optics and acoustics
waves of the collective–

Deadmen
pulsing-clicking winds of noise,
our world is mute
filled with haze
and white soundless screams of
a dead language–
compiledcompressed
ofzeroesandones
no no yes yes no no no no
no no yes yes no no no yes
life without life; static and tolerance

Deadmen
liberators, clutching our cells of solar drops
with darkness and pigments
flowing with currents
and circuits
networked to an immortal
mother
never a shut down, never
– upload and crash



The Nursery

By Nick Kimbro

She bore the child herself in a pool of water that boiled as her contractions melted together. When the thing came she screamed, tumbled from the tub and grasped on the table for scissors, desperate to cut it away. When she'd regained her composure, she was able to consider it. Its skin was a deep shade of red with so many humps and bulges it looked more like a stone than a person. And its face—that's how she knew it was wrong. It was not an infant's face, but mature, flat and mashed together with a grin that stretched round its head like a jack-o-lantern. It had *teeth* for Christ's sake, and pupils that swallowed its eyes in black.

But for all of that, it was a quiet thing. It just laid there and stared up at her when she was in the room, didn't soil itself, didn't bother crying out for her breast. It seemed to study her, she thought, as if for traces of the thing's father, rather than the other way around.

She had hoped when it came that something would jar her memory, spark some kind of recognition. Although as she looked at it lying still in its crib, its bed clothes stained black like charcoal, there was nothing. She would remember a father like that, she decided. The child's conception, it seemed, had been immaculate.

Which raised all sorts of questions.

After the first few days she kept it locked in the nursery, mostly. Dark but for a small lamp on a table in the corner. She spent her time on the couch, listening to the monitor at her elbow and wondering when the father would appear. The monitor was silent, except every now and then it would groan, a low, warbling pitch that sounded like a record player with cotton stuffed into it. Every now and then the groaning would verge upon speech, although she could not understand a word of it, as if it were a different language.

"It's alright, darling," she cooed through the monitor. "I'm sure he'll be here soon. He wouldn't have left you for no reason."

Secretly, her main regret, more than the father's absence, more than the child itself, was being denied the pleasures of conception. Somehow it was worse, this co-opting of her womb. Worse than rape, she thought.

She'd lost track of the days when a group of children appeared in costumes at her doorstep: superheroes and scary masks; a miniature Freddy Kruger leered from her front stoop. When she appeared they recoiled, unsure whether or not she was in costume. Her eyes had bags slung beneath them, her hair had been put up weeks ago, now slumped loose to one side with oily tendrils hanging down. Her dress hung off one shoulder and her skin was pale. She did not even want to contemplate her smell.

"Trick or treat?" they said, uncertain, and she had to smile.

"Yes," she said. "Yes, it is, isn't it. Let me just go check the pantry. I'm sure I have something to give you." When she came back though they were gone.

She didn't know how long she sat before the monitor startled her by groaning. It was different than before, more articulate, although she still could not understand a word. It sounded, she thought, like a record playing backwards. She went to the door to the nursery and pressed her ear against it, heard nothing. "Are you okay in there?" she called. "Do you want mommy?" She hadn't so much as picked it up since she first cut it away.

She rattled the door handle and remembered that it was locked, tried to think of where she'd left the key. She checked the end table drawers, the drawers in the kitchen, the surfaces, but couldn't find anything. She returned to the door and jammed her ear against it. This time there was a sound coming from inside. Some kind of foot steps, creaking from one side of the room to the other.

"Baby?" she asked, realizing she'd never given it a name. "Is someone in there with you?" Then: "Who's there? What do you want with my child? Hear that? *My child!*"

She listened although there was no answer. The footsteps inside had stopped. There was a moment of hesitation in which she considered what might be waiting for her on the other side, before she reared back and threw her diminutive self against it. The door rattled on its hinges, but didn't budge. She'd grown thin in recent weeks. Couldn't remember the last time she'd eaten. She threw herself against it several times before the door flung open into an empty room. She checked the crib although all that was there was a pile of soot, and a smell of sulphur hung in the air. On the far side of the room the window was open, the sheer curtain sashaying in the breeze. "Baby?" she asked, and walked to the window, staring out at the glowing pumpkins lining the streets, the cries of a few remaining children still making their rounds from door to door, and a harvest moon, almost red in color slung beneath a cold, crystal sky.

She sighed and felt a tear in her eye, although when she slumped forward she could feel behind her a presence, one that made her jump before enfolding her and holding her still. A pair of arms encircled her, held her against her belly, and she allowed it to support her, leaning her head back against its shoulder, unable to see a thing.

“Why me?” she asked, although there was no answer, just a reassuring pulse of pressure before it released her and a draft of air carried it out through the window. She tried to follow with her eyes, although there was nothing to see. Just a dull beating of wings, carrying one more possibility away.





THE 5TH OF JULY

A . A . GARRISON

Click.

The switch in Jacob's head flicked off, and the phantom men faded away. They had pursued him from the acupuncture clinic and into the alleyway, only to vanish as mysteriously as they'd appeared.

"Oh God," Jacob said, once he'd stopped screaming. "God."

Jacob was thirty-three, and worked in a factory that recycled corpses into green-colored food, and had never had problems with phantom men or women. He collapsed into the alley which had moments ago been his tomb, hugging himself against the shaking. This being the Dying City, he shared the space with white-eyed corpses and used hypodermics, the walls graffitied in bodily fluids. He'd bitten his lip, and the blood wouldn't wipe away.

He left the stinking alley, shirtless, and went dazedly down the sidewalk. It was just after the Fourth, so people were dismantling the star-spangled swags and lynched Enemy men, looking as though the country itself were over. The passing faces reflected this, ignoring the sloven man amongst them. Vendors hawked leftover Enemy heads, yelling, "Half-price! Some women and children left!" Jacob found a phone booth.

He called the acupuncture clinic as a man beside the booth made faces and exposed himself, and the acupuncturist herself answered. Jacob apologized, though he was unsure of his sincerity; he hadn't wanted the phantom men to appear and chase him away. The woman said it was okay, there were sometimes offbeat reactions to the procedure, and Jacob promised to come by and retrieve his shirt.

As he hung up, however, the switch in his head cycled all over again.

Click, and the men materialized in their dozens, in the streets and on rooftops and places no man should be. They wore maps of the night sky and spoke riddles that Jacob heard in his head: Dine on your suffering -- God is faceless -- All is mystery. Each man brandished sharp metal weapons that didn't reflect the light, the wretched blades swinging and nearing.

Jacob ugh!'d and shouldered through the crowd, the disturbed answering with grunts and curses. He ran three blocks then more, faster than he ever had. He stole a look over his shoulder to find the men approaching in swarm, no less than fifty-strong, sliding liquidly through the people Jacob had pushed aside. The swords waved.

Blessed affliction, said one of the men. Teacher darkness.

Into the sunless subway, Jacob dancing down the stairwell. By the concourse, the train was open and silver, mirroring Jacob but not his pursuers. The doors began their seal and he screamed desperately, the men literally at heel. Then he was crashing inside and the train moving, like in a movie.

He screamed twice and then only muttered, hugging a pole. People allowed him a berth and cast looks. One snapped a picture. A masturbator glanced over but didn't stop. Soon, the switch in Jacob's head went off.

"Oh God," he said.

Jacob fell into a bench and wiped his forehead, trembling as though cold. A corpse occupied the adjoining seat, its tourniquet still tied, and Jacob did not notice. He rode the subway, still without a shirt, and at some point realized a young woman had sat beside him.

She was frazzled and wide-eyed. The left half of her head was caked in blood, the hair matted like a filthy hat. She said, "Hi, hey. You see them, too?"

Jacob couldn't reply. He watched her.

"They were chasing me, also," the woman said. "I followed you. In here, like."

"I didn't see you," was all Jacob could think to say. The people around them kept their distance, in a solidarity of revulsion.

"Let's get coffee and drugs," the woman said.

The two disembarked at the next stop.

The diner presented a thick heat, and the smells and sounds of cooking beef. Jacob and the woman took a booth beside a babbling old woman and a young boy holding an Enemy head in his lap. Jacob kept expecting the switch to fire, but it held off. He didn't know if this was good or bad.

Using all three eyes, the cook watched Jacob and his acquaintance as they seated.

The waitress was too anxious not to be high. Katherine, if nametags are to be believed. She was quick with the coffee, Jacob and the woman drinking greedily. They dumped in milk and cream and the various drugs in the table's rack, periodically adding more. Jacob took an IV as the crone beside them lectured the boy in loud gibbering verse.

"Was in a car accident," said Jacob's bloody friend. "Hit my head, and that's when I saw them. The men."

Jacob nodded as though expecting this. "I had acupuncture, here." He pointed to his forehead, a tilak of dried blood. "She stuck me, the acupuncturist, and then I saw them. Chased me into the street, and disappeared. Thought I was gonna die." He sipped his coffee but his bare torso stayed cold. He felt naked.

"Yeah, same here," the woman said. "Chased me, I mean. Not the acupuncture ..."

The three-eye cook watched from behind the long counter, large and toqued and chopping human liver. The old woman babbled. There was a TV mounted for the room at large, on it a tanned blonde news anchor. The screen cut to masked Enemy men making threats, then back to the blonde, who was soon unclothed and bent over, commenting all the while.

The bloody woman listened to the TV, then said, "You think this is it? The terrorism they've been talking about for today? All those Enemy guys in the hats. This is the fifth, today."

Jacob surveyed the diner, where the patrons ate or injected or fornicated, as normal. "Looks like it's just us, if it is," he concluded. "They sure picked some lowly folk to terrorize."

The woman sipped. "Yeah, I just thought ..."

The cook's cleaver thock'd the cutting board as he stared darkly the two, the livers amassing.

"What do we do, next time?" the woman asked. "Fight them, the men?"

Jacob stroked his chin as though bearded. "I dunno." He wanted to find a shirt.

“We can’t just ... just run.”

Jacob made a reproving face. “They have swords, and knives,” he said squarely, and sipped his pharmaceutical coffee. The old woman behind him proclaimed strange slogans as though in answer. Outside, a bruised man stood amidst pushcarts of vomit vendors, his hands in a Y.

“The police, then?” the bloody woman asked.

Jacob set down his cup, aborting a sip. “And tell them what? That we’re being chased by guys only we can see? They’d put us in straitjackets.”

The cook accumulated a mound of livers despite liver being offered in no capacity. The TV addressed the diner in general. The diners moaned in gratification or death.

“And if it happens again?” the woman asked. She was small, and made smaller by fear.

Jacob thought a moment. “Then we run.”

Katherine the waitress refreshed their coffees without asking. Jacob asked for a fresh shaker of

cocaine, and then the check. The waitress had more eyes than the cook, and these were none friendlier.

“Should go clean yourself up,” Jacob said to his friend. “There’s blood.” He indicated the right side of his face.

The woman nodded, and went to the ladies’ room. Its door activated a mechanism, and the TV cut to a surveillance feed, showing the woman cleaning herself and then urinating. In the dining room, heads turned disinterestedly.

She returned some minutes later, cleaner but not clean. “Let’s go,” she said. “They have one of those cameras here ...”

Jacob stood with the check. The young boy had at some point vacated the neighboring booth, yet the old woman talked on. The cook watched Jacob pay and leave, chopping, chopping.

The two strolled down the corpse-ridden sidewalk, surrounded by the Dying City and its diseases. Jacob led them into a boutique clothing store where a fan blew and young men dueled. The woman talked as Jacob searched out a shirt of appropriate size.

“I was very perceptive as a girl,” she said. “Still am, I guess, but as a child ... it was hard. Too perceptive for my own good. I could tell when people were lying, or in pain, or didn’t like me. All those feelings. I ended up isolated. They say ignorance is bliss.” Pause. “Anyway, I was just thinking maybe it had something to do with what’s happening to us. Are you like that at all, overly perceptive?”

Jacob stopped riffling the clothes, said “No,” and resumed.

The woman said, “Oh. Okay.”





Jacob selected a white tee-shirt that was bloodstained but fit him. It cost a dollar, and he put it on then and there. There was a TV here, too, and it showed more masked Enemy men, the elderly cashier showing them interest. The men quoted God and hefted rifles and pointed and threatened, then the attractive female anchor told you how to perceive them. Jacob and the woman returned to the snide city street.

Traffic, turmoil, noise in abundance. The discords of life in every passed face. Corpses were removed from the sidewalks with a machine made for such, to be recycled, by Jacob perhaps. He and the woman walked for nearly a half hour, with no destination stated or implied.

“Now that I think of it,” Jacob said, walking, “there was one time I saw something.”

The woman gave him her attention. “Oh yeah?”

“I was young, probably about ten, and it was a school day. I was in the schoolyard and it was sunny and we was playing, and then this thing catches my eye -- a giant TV set, standing behind a boy. It had arms and legs, the TV, and these tin-foiled rabbit ears that didn’t move when it leaned. And a face too, the TV had a face, on its screen, a horrible face. Jagged teeth, these

black eyes what hurt mine to see ‘em. It haunts me.

“So there’s this TV and this boy, and the TV’s whispering into the boy’s ear. After a bit, he turns to this little girl across the yard, his face all screwed up -- like maybe he don’t like what the TV is sayin’, but at the same time, does, you know? Eventually the TV says one last thing and points yonder to the girl. Well, the boy trots right over and slaps her a good one in the face. She starts crying, a’course, and the boy kinda snaps to and sees what he done, and he starts crying. A teacher run over and settled things. Woo! what a mess.

“Later, I looked for the TV, but it was gone.”

The woman started to reply -- but then the head-switches clicked again, stopping her and Jacob in their tracks. They exchanged alarm as the evil coalition of men appeared in their midst, immediately giving chase. Jacob took the woman’s hand and they ran for their lives.

Jacob elbowed and fought, but the throng was dense and entranced. The woman slowed him further and it was clear this was the end, but still he plowed deeper into the city, the phantom men encroaching. The two passed bloody buildings and drawn storefronts, before coming to another alley, its end dead.

Jacob met the wall weary and resigned, but the woman screamed and beat the brick and tried to climb. She soon gave up and flipped around, joining Jacob in his firing-squad pose. The phantom men boiled inside the corridor with cockroach abandon, the woman and Jacob screaming in identical note, wrapped around each other in a rude hug. A din of profound proverbs flooded their third ears, the creatures sermonizing even as they raised their blades.

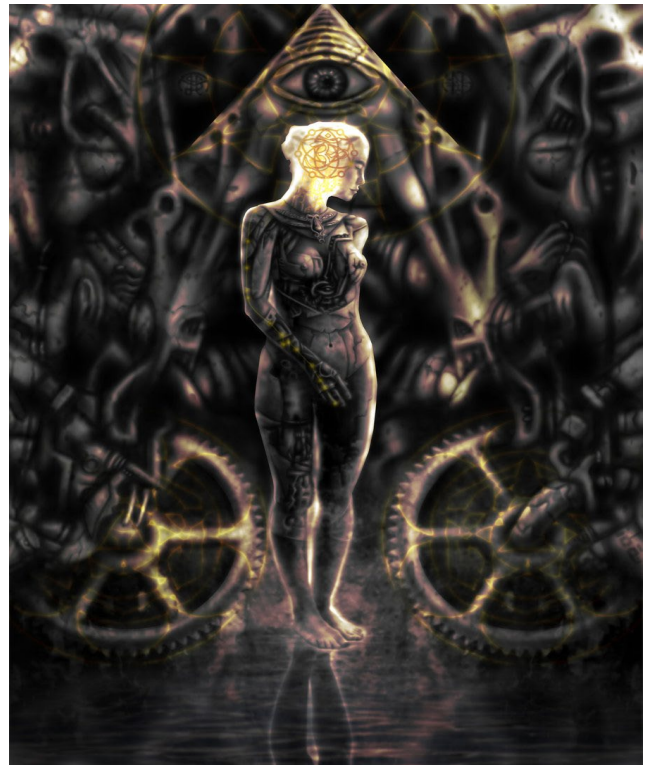
God has no eyes. All is mystery.

Then, just before the swords could fall: a magnificent crack from far away, the day growing brighter. It drew the pair's attention in spite of things, and Jacob had time to remember the masked men on TV, and their threats and guns and bombs.

Silently, the nuke swept down and everywhere, Jacob becoming dust with the Dying City.

Only the phantom men remained, robbed of their prey.

"Well damn," said one of the them, his sword flagging. The men looked to one another, then moped off.





THE EVIL THAT MEN DO

Part 6

“The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones”. Act 3, Scene II – *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare

Warning: This story contains graphic adult situations, including vulgarity, nudity, sexual content, and torture. Discretion is advised.

All was darkness, palpable with fear. Then, so low that it could be mistaken for one's own breath, came a whisper in the gloom. Then another. Soon several unknown and indiscernible voices joined together to rise and fall about the veil of shadows.

As more phantom chants joined in, a reddish mist aflame with dread roiled into view. It spread until it consumed all. Then began the opening strains of ‘O Fortuna’ from ‘Carmina Burana’ by Carl Orff. And from the midst of the murk images appeared, approaching rapidly from the center of the haze. And with the final crescendo of ‘O Fortuna’ blaring in the basement, it revealed its true form.

“Welcome back, my horny little devils! Once again we bring to you all the best diabolical sex, torture, and mayhem the underworld has to offer! So just sit back, get a hold of yourselves, and get ready to have your minds blown again by your favorite Succubi of them all, Ms. Phistopheles!” Renee announced with glee, cracking her whip overhead. She came into the camera shot in the basement standing in a flaming red sled pulled shakily by six nude women crawling in red pony-play garb. They had leather harnesses tightly strapped across their bodies, and were pulling the sled on their hands and knees as fast as they could. The bit harness gags they drooled from lead tightly to Renee's gloved hand, and fiery feathers attached to the harness danced above their heads. Bells jingled from nipple clamps painfully attached to ample breasts bouncing up and down as they trotted panting into view, their breathing labored from their exertions. “Whoa!” Renee shouted with a crack of her whip on one of her unfortunate ponies' ass, making her yelp in pain as the sled drew up to an appointed spot and stopped.

“Yes, my fans, once again I come to you live from Hades, where there's always an ample amount of damned souls to torment, all for your demented delight!” Renee announced with glee as she leaped deftly from the sled to the floor. She had on her red latex outfit, consisting of a revealing corset, full-length gloves reaching to her elbows, a G-string complete with an attached devil tail trailing behind, thigh-high stiletto-heel boots, and a full-length cape. Lastly, she had on a red velvet mask that covered most of her face except for her luscious mouth.

Rick sat back behind his camera and sighed. He felt himself become aroused, a growing erection pressing uncomfortably against his denim jeans. ‘Damn, she looks good. But then, she always looks good. If only she would mix business with a little pleasure now and then.’ he thought, wistfully.

“And I have a special treat for you tonight as well!” Renee continued. “Some of you may remember our horny hubby and his warped wifey from some time ago. Well, the response for an encore was enormous! And considering that their unabashed and limitless passion for pain and humiliation is exactly what you want, they have gladly returned to give you all that, and more!” She looked to either side, opening her arms wide and waving her hands to herself.

Immediately appearing into view were Carl and his girlfriend, Cyndi Beth, dressed in demon costumes consisting of oversize shoes resembling cloven feet, furred pants covering them from the waist down (Cyndi went topless with her ample bosom, no problem for her since she worked at a strip club), red food coloring smeared across their bodies, oversize fake fangs jutting up from their lower jaw, and horns adorning their heads.

In one hand they held a satanic-looking pitchfork, and in the other Cyndi Lauper led Kent and Carl dragged Karen by chain leashes attached to their collars, their hands manacled behind them. They were roughly cast to Renee's feet once they reached her.

"And without further ado, for your pleasure, or pain in their case, here they are! My little pain-sluts, stand and give a bow to your audience!" she announced majestically, gesturing to the cameras.

Kent and Karen lay against each other's nude bodies breathing heavily with their heads bowed in shame, unmoving.

Renee let her arms fall to her sides in exasperation.

"Cut!" she called out.

Rick turned off his video camera as did Wilbur, Carl's brother. Wilbur resembled his brother in many ways, from the permanent butt-crack view right down to the perpetually yellow-stained thumb and two fingers from eating so many cheese flavored crunchy snacks. And their own personal hygiene wavered between merely annoying to downright vulgar due to their knack for wearing the same clothes for weeks on end, or brutally noxious when their flatulence reared its ugly head. Maybe it was due to the crunchy cheese snacks. Whatever the reason, Renee only kept them on the payroll because they came cheap, and the two adequately knew what they were doing and did their jobs well enough.

Keith switched off the distant, low wailing of the doomed voices from hell and Annie cut off the fog machine that was producing the mysterious and evil-looking mist. Renee sighed and squatted next to Kent and Karen.

"What do you think your doing?" she asked. When she received no answer, she fiercely grabbed the back of Kent's hair and jerked his head painfully around to face her stern visage.

"I grow weary of your lack of fervor for this enterprise, do you understand? Now, you and my bitch here have one of two choices. 'A', you do this my way and get out with a minimum of scar tissue; or 'B', you continue to resist and curse the day you were born, understand?" Renee said coldly through clenched teeth.

"Yes! We'll do what you say, ...Mistress!" Karen said, almost throwing in 'Mistress' too late. Kent could only nod and gasp in pain with his eyes shut tightly.

Renee's smile was effortlessly back in place. "Now, see? That wasn't so hard, was it? And just to make sure we understand each other..." her voice trailed off as she gave each of them a vicious slap across the face.

She stood up and signaled the others. "Ok, once more, with feeling!" she said, laughing. Annie flipped on the fog machine, Keith the low voices of the damned, and Rick and Wilbur the two video cameras. "Action!" she called.

"And without further ado, for your pleasure, or pain in their case, here they are! My little pain-sluts, stand and give a bow to your audience!" she repeated, opening her arms wide once more.

Kent and Karen stumbled to their feet as quickly as they could, wearing as good a smile as they could force. Renee put a hand behind the necks of the two. Her broad, Cheshire cat smile was back in place as she made a hidden firm motion with her fingers behind their necks for them to bow their heads, which they immediately did.

"Aaaaannnnnd, cut!" Renee announced. "How was that, Rick, Wilbur?"

"Great, boss." Rick replied. Wilbur gave the 'ok' signal with his yellowed thumb and forefinger.

"Good!" Renee grinned, stepping around to face her two slaves. At a nod to one of her 'demon helpers',

Cyndi Beth stepped forward and with a quick, sweeping motion laid the back of her trident down hard on both the slaves' calves simultaneously, causing them to scream in agony and fall to their knees before their Mistress. Smiling, she drew upon the chains of their leashes until the slack between them disappeared and the two were pulled next to each other's collars. The terror on their faces inflamed her insatiable desire for torture and pain on the helpless, naked pair before her as she stood imperiously before them.

"Showtime, my pets." she purred, licking her lips.

* * * * *

'They are back, father'.

"Yes, my child, I saw.'

'Why have they returned? Why, my husband?'

'I know not, good wife, but returned they have, and brought with them many that suffer as we once did. And they treat them even worse than they treated us. It is an abomination.'

'Yes, it is, for does not one of them reveal their true image, that of a daughter of Satan herself?'

'She does, my son, and by her actions she is the most foul creature we have ever seen.'

'And she has turned our beautiful house into the very abode of sin and suffering.'

'Father, what shall we do?'

'Children, my good wife, we shall do what God ordains for us to do. Our house is infected by their kind once again, but by God's good graces we will purge the wicked from it.'

'Amen, Father.'

* * * * *

Renee watched as Archie and Wilbur, with Annie to help them, began setting up props for the next shoot. She jumped slightly as she felt two arms tenderly hug her from behind. Sighing, she turned around to see a smiling Rick.

"Rick, now is not the time or place for this, you can understand that, can't you?"

Rick didn't let go, but continued to hold her loosely in his arms. "Well then, can I make an appointment?" he grinned.

She put forth her arms and patted him lightly on his hips. "Once things get going well, and we get more help here, then maybe we can indulge our animal instincts," she replied.

Rick bent down to kiss Renee, and was rewarded with a half-hearted one in return. "Renee, I don't want you to want me just for sex. I'm in love with you, can't you see that? I want you to take my heart, not just this," he pleaded, reaching down and guiding her hand onto his swollen groin.

Renee jerked her hand away. "Well Rick, you're just going to have to fall *OUT* of love with me, ok?" she replied irritated. "That ship sailed a long time ago and sank. Nothing personal, but I don't go there anymore."

"What about earlier tonight, when we almost screwed each other in your bedroom?" Rick implored. "Hey, I get weak like anyone else!" Renee almost shouted, getting mad. "If you still want to work for me, get it through your head that you're just an employee of mine, got that?" She broke free of Rick's arms and walked forward a few paces to continue to watch the setup. Rick stood back, eyes moistening, slowly shook his head a

few times, and then went back and seated himself behind his camera.

* * * * *

“Action!” announced Renee.

“Welcome back, fans and pervs alike! In horror, oops, tee hee, in *honor* of the London Olympics, I only thought it fair that we here should devote some time to create something extra special for you out there. So, we devised our own little track and field event! We call it the '20 yard cross dash'! Why? Glad you asked! Over here we have our heroine, the stalwart wifey, all set up and ready to go!”

Carl pulled off a black sheet that covered a bound and gagged Karen. She had been tied in an upright kneeling position with thin cords at her ankles, knees, wrists to ankles, and finally a painful shibari tie across her chest that encircled her upper body and looped around and bisected her breasts painfully until they were two mounds of purplish flesh. She was straddling a taut, coarse rope with hard knots tied in intervals of around one foot in length. The ends were attached to eye bolts angled slightly upwards from a beam of wood right behind her to one sixty feet before her, the effect causing her pussy to burn in agony whenever she had to endure moving over one of the knots. Her labored breathing due to her exertions to remain upright made the holed ball gag she wore almost whistle. It was a singular gag, one made precisely for this torture, for it had a three-inch extension about the size of a pencil jutting out in front. A grinning Carl and Cyndi Beth stood on each side of her, pitchforks in hand, smirking.

“Now here’s all our trapeze artist has to do,” Renee explained. “She has to walk on her knees down the knotted line to reach a keypad set in the beam before her. She will have six minutes to make it down the sixty feet of cord to reach a numbered switch pad and enter a combination I have given her. Our two devils will help make sure she doesn’t topple over, because if it looks like she will, all they have to do is this.” At a gesture from Renee, the two devils began poking either side of Karen unmercifully with the ends of their sharpened pitchforks.

The cameras switched back to Renee. “Now, what will entering the combination do? Funny you should ask. For doing so will rescue her hubby here.” Renee pulled down a large, black sheet that was covering a Saint Andrews Cross. Secured on the cross upside down was a nude and ball-gagged Kent. He was writhing this way and that, trying unsuccessfully to dislodge an object jammed firmly in his anus.

“Oh, my dear, what have you gotten yourself into this time?” Renee said with mock harshness. She looked up at his crotch. “Why, it looks like a tremendous clear plastic dildo!” she announced, making her point by hammering it home with her fist a few more times, making Kent groan and twitch in misery each time she did so. Renee looked at a transparent flexible tube running up from it to an enema bag hung from a spreader bar attached to the top of the cross. “Hmmm, an enema bag. Have you been irregular lately?” she asked Kent. Renee further studied the contraption. A metal clip with a release mechanism pinched the tube shut. For the moment. A red liquid led from the enema bag down to the metal clip. “Oh, don’t like the looks of that, do you my pet?” Renee teased. “That red stuff could be anything.” She looked back at the cameras and winked. Wires led from the release mechanism down to a combination numbered switch pad mounted on a wooden beam directly across from Karen and at the height of her face. Sitting on the floor next to it was a large clock timer that was set for six minutes.

“And now, without further ado, on with the event!” Renee announced cheerfully. “Here’s how this works. If our trapeze artist can make her way on her knees to the numbered control pad before her on the far beam, and enter the code I told her to memorize, she’ll keep the release mechanism from opening, and disgorging whatever vile substance in the bag into her darlings’ bowels. Everyone with me? Good! Now, let’s get this on the road, already!” Renee announced gleefully.

An electronically reproduced report of a starter’s pistol was heard followed by a crowd cheering inside a stadium, and with initial poking from Carl and Cyndi Beth that made Karen yelp around her gag, she began to inch her wobbling way forward. Both cameras were on Karen, complete to the last detail such as a stopwatch

running off the seconds in tenths backwards toward zero. Renee, who had stayed next to Kent, watched his panicked actions with great amusement. She looked back to Karen, who had stopped to catch her breath despite her two tormenters trying to force her onward with their pitchforks. Renee shook her head.

“Doesn’t look good, lover. Wifey apparently doesn’t have what it takes. Too bad. If she only knew. Shall I tell her?” she announced wickedly. She rose up, her cloak billowing behind her with a flourish, and reached behind one of the supports of the cross to something that was hidden from view. Withdrawing what looked like a small jar, she stared down at it as she held it in both hands, a cruel smile slowly forming on her lips. Then she looked first at Kent, and then Karen, who despite the need for hurrying could only stare at Renee, mesmerized at what she had in mind for her husband. Having seemingly finally made up her mind, she slowly turned to Kent.

“Want to know what’s in your enema bag, lover?” she asked slowly, still covering the jar with her hands. Then she stooped down again in camera shot until their eyes met and she began to twist the lid of jar slowly. “Nothing exotic. You can find it in any grocery store. You just have to prepare it carefully, or suffer some bad side effects, like... extreme pain, shall we say?” she announced sweetly.

Having finally removed the lid of the jar, she took a deep breath of the liquid residue still left in the jar and closed her eyes in rapt pleasure. Then she opened them and held the jar near Kent’s nose. “Tell me lover,” as her eyes met Kent’s, “has your honey ever made you dinner using Cayenne Pepper?”

As Renee’s words sunk in and the sharp, stinging aroma of the peppers reached his nostrils Kent’s blood ran cold. Renee nodded her head at Kent, a broad evil smile growing. He tore his eyes away from Renee and jerked his head up at the infernal bag containing that hideous concoction and began to panic even more. He pulled and tugged furiously at his bonds, and wrenched his body back and forth in a futile effort to somehow break free of his bonds.

Renee stood up, her laughter at Kent’s reaction echoing throughout the basement. Karen quickly looked at the clock in front of her. She had lost almost two minutes just kneeling there listening to Renee! She began to move forward again as quickly as she dared, blood from her skinned knees growing on the basement floor. Her adrenaline took over, and she no longer minded the pain so much from the knots and binding straps as much as she did earlier. Wobbling, trembling, but remaining upright, thanks in part to Carl and Cyndi Beth on either side of her, she fixed her tear-filled eyes on the numbered keypad ahead and kept repeating in her mind the combination Renee had given to her before they began.

In the meantime Renee had replaced the lid on the jar and had raised it in the air, looking at it with great interest. “You see, Cayenne Pepper doesn’t do any real tissue damage. What it does do is simulate the pain of real damage to tissue due to it containing capsaicin, a substance that tricks the body into thinking damage has occurred, but hasn’t. I don’t really understand it all myself. All I care is that tissue is not damaged. And tissue that is not damaged can keep being subjected to Cayenne, understand, love?” she looked down at Kent’s face and winked wickedly.

“It’s funny, but there actually are recipes for Cayenne Pepper enemas. But those called for a few teaspoons of it, which actually impart healthy therapeutic results. But since I couldn’t find a teaspoon in time I just had to use the entire container. How about that, my pet? We could save what’s going to come out of you, slather it over some lettuce, and voila, you and your precious Karen have salad dressing for your next meal!” She cut her face down at Kent, whose eyes were pleading with Renee. She dropped down face to face, to look deeply into those horrified eyes, to drink in his horror like a tall, cool glass of water. Her eyes took on a glazed look of evil desire.

“What would you do for me, lover, to stop this right now? Would you do anything, right in front of your wife, as she tries to save you from unimaginable pain, hmmm? I’ll make a deal with you. If you can pleasure me in time, I’ll pull out the tube, and you won’t have homemade lava filling your colon, ok?” she breathed huskily. “Or do you have unquestioning faith in her? You don’t have much time left, you’d better decide in a few seconds.”

Renee slowly stood and unsnapped her cloak and slipped out of her G-string, letting them fall to the floor, her perfectly shaved vagina right in front of Kent's face. She leaned forward and unstrapped his ball gag, spinning it around in one hand before letting it drop to the ground. Then she reached over and grasped a support of the cross he was bound to with each hand and waved her bare crotch mere inches in front of his face. Rick gaped behind his camera. "Lucky bastard," he muttered.

"What will it be, my pet? Can you trust your wife, or will you pleasure me in time?"

Kent stared at Renee's beauty, felt her overwhelming sexual attraction, and luscious-looking muff with its musky juices glistening, so inviting with it just an inch from his mouth. And despite his predicament felt himself growing a huge erection. Taking a look at Karen, who was still struggling her way along, being poked and prodded by Carl and Cyndi Beth, looked up into Renee's triumphant eyes before closing his in resignation.

"You... Goddamned... bitch..." his voice trailed off. He blinked tears from his eyes and then parted them slightly to fix them upon Renee's inviting pussy. He opened his mouth, ready to service her.

Renee thrust her hips forward forcefully to find Kent's tongue waiting. "Yes... yes... yes, Ooohhhhhh yes..." Renee moaned, still grasping the cross as she began to grind her cunt around and around in Kent's mouth as hard as she could. She leaned her head back and continued to groan, her legs tensing as he licked and sucked her pussy for all his worth. "I may just have to keep you, my pet," she breathed.

'Holy crap, who is this guy, a porn star?' Rick thought to himself. In the few times his tongue and Renee's clitoris crossed paths she had never had a reaction this great. 'She won't mix business with pleasure but she'll do this loser? I am definitely beginning to hate this guy.'

Renee dreamily looked down at Kent, working frantically on her shaved sex. She looked to one side, smirked, and then said, "Take a look at your wifey, my pet. It's most interesting to see."

Kent looked and froze. Karen had made it to the keypad after all, a bare thirty seconds to go. He saw that Cyndi Beth had wrestled her head around to look at Kent eating out Renee. And the look on Karen's face was one of such hurt like Kent had never seen before.

Renee backed away and spun around with a flourish, laughing uproariously. "You lose!" she gloated, grinning mockingly at Kent. "Thanks for the tongue-lashing. Now get ready for your insides to be napalmed, fool!"

Then Karen fixed her eyes on Renee, and glowered at her with pure, unadulterated hatred. She wrenched her head away from Cyndi Beth, almost falling over in the process, and began to tap out the combination numbers on the keypad.

Renee stopped laughing and gaped at her. "You're going to free this shit after what he just did?" she called to Karen. "What are you? Did Kent marry a woman or a doormat?" Karen ignored her and finished keying in the combination. A green light turned on with a 'beep'. She looked up at Renee in triumph.

"Not bad, sweetheart." Renee said. "Only one little problem, though. There is no combination to unlock to keep the release mechanism from functioning! Hope you liked your little floor exercise." she said with glee. Looking with malicious satisfaction into Kent's face shaking slowly back and forth in resignation, his body feebly struggling one last time to somehow save himself, Renee turned to face the cameras.

"Oh, my." she said, hands on her cheeks, turning to indicate both Kent and Karen. "Looks like a lot of suffering is coming Kent's way in just a few seconds, isn't it? Whatever could happen to save him in his hour of need?" she announced in mock concern as the timer reached the five second mark.

Then the lights went out.

Copyright © 2012 Kay Mallory All Rights Reserved.





© Markus Vogt | www.markusvogt.eu

<http://markusvogt.deviantart.com/>

DARK DAYS

BY DILUCULI

“Hello?”, called a voice distorted by speakers. It was framed by the noise of fast moving rotor blades, while some helicopters flew over the dark ruin of a city. They swept the surface with harsh white light. “Hello? Is there anybody?”, the voice kept on calling tirelessly while blank carcasses of destroyed buildings towered as if they were seeking help. “Hello!” Nowhere was a single sign of life. The bright lights just discovered debris. “Hello?” The helicopters moved along slowly. No one of their crew knew, what lied quiet beneath the boulders. Between stones and cement metal trap doors were hidden. Entrances into an underground labyrinth made of countless hallways and rooms without windows. The walls were covered with colourful graffiti, Forbidden graffiti. In one of the rooms was a group of five people. They gathered in front of a small rusty ladder beneath a slightly opened hatch and listened intensely into the darkness. No one dared to breath while the cold lights wandered over the hatch above them. With a painful slowness the noise of the helicopters faded away.

One of the group closed the hatch and another one lightened a small candle. The group consisted mainly of teenagers, the oldest of them was somewhere in his twenties. The youngest member of the group was a little boy of about 13 years. All members of the group wore tattered clothing. “Why’re they doing that?”, the girl holding the candle asked whispering. “No idea. Maybe they think someone’s stupid enough to answer.”, the oldest of them answered. His name was Dreg. The second girl of the group shrugged her shoulders. “What a waste of energy.”, she said. “Better they waste it that way than hunting us down”, the fifth member noted. A whispered discussion was about to take place, when Dreg hushed them. “Shut up! We go out!”, he commanded hissing. He opened the hatch and climbed out. The other four followed him. The last of them was the girl with the candle named Myst. The other members of the group were called Mäss (he was the youngest of them), Vice (the other girl) and Sicko. Mäss brought some improvised torches which were lit with the candle. They didn’t really shed light, it was more a dim glow, but it was good enough to find a way through the debris. The group split into three and vanished in the ruins. They were searching for anything that could be useful to them. When they met again at the hatch, the loot was poor. They hadn’t found anything that contained even a tiny bit of electricity. the only exception was Vice. She had been lucky and found some unused glow sticks. They hid the rests of their torches and climbed through the hatch back into the underground.

Beneath the ruins of the city, the former tunnels, cellars and sewers still formed a complex (and for most parts intact) structure. It was just slightly modified by its recent inhabitants. Of course there were a lot of problems concerning fresh air, food, light and hygiene. Therefore, there was no way a big community could survive for long there. Instead, the underground was occupied by several smaller groups. They occasionally helped each other and there was something like trade among the groups, but most of the time, each was busy surviving. There once had been fights among the different groups. Now they weren’t living peacefully together, the situation was more like a more stable truce. The dwellers in the undergrounds had to face enough troubles without brutal gang rivalry. There were the problems of the daily life and also troops trying to get rid of them. Where the ruins ended, a wasteland began. It separated the city ruins from an intact city. A city with energy and wealth. The inhabitants of the ruins and their underground named that bright city just “Gem”. Their own home was simply called “The underground” for obvious reasons. It was no rarity that desperate people tried to break into Gem. The common raids in the ruins by the troops were “clearing operations” to make sure no one was living close to Gem. Everybody knew, that the troops were playing cats-and-mouse with the inhabitants of the underground. The rules were simple: In fact, there was just one: They killed everybody in their sight, but just searched the surface, It wasn’t a real rule, just the way they played the game. No one ever said it was fair. Sometimes there were hunting parties. During a hunting party, some troops entered the underground and forced

people onto the surface. Then the hunting began. It was a cruel slaughter just for the sick fun of some bored Gem citizens or troop officers. Those huntings took place very irregularly, so there was no way to predict them before it was too late.

Dregs, Myst, Mäss, Vice and Sicko returned to their home. It was mainly a former basement garage, where something similar to private areas were made out of garbage. The community that lived here contained about 16 people. They named themselves "Crasht". There was a leader, though she tried not to rule the others. She called herself Ragtag to illustrate this attitude. Some time ago she was elected by the Crasht and since then the majority never called her back. So Ragtag stayed in command.

When Dregs and his friends returned home, he went to Ragtag's place. He wasn't the only one wanting to report her. Four others already waited there. There was no need to form a line. Everyone knew everybody. As long no one has been really lucky on his foray or had important information to share there was no need to jump the queue. There was a muted discussion about the helicopters going on when Dregs arrived.

"I'm sure of this.", one of the four said when Dregs joined them by saying: "Hi folks." "Oh, hey there Dregs. Your timing is just perfect. Cala spread some fresh fear. Do you want some?" a man with the chosen name Tramb greeted grinning. Cala was the short term for Calamity and the name of the woman who just had spoken. "Ah, you know, I can never have enough of that. So what's it?", Dregs asked jokingly. With slightly sour face, Cala repeated her opinion on the helicopters. She thought, the troops were preparing for a hunt. But she had no idea, why they kept on shouting. The other two people there were named Ded and Scum. "I'm still convinced that they were searching for someone.", Scum said, when Ragtag showed up. She was accompanied by a guy named BOOMerang. "Did anyone find some food?", Ragtag asked and ended the discussion. Only Tramb and his son Rascal did. It wasn't much, three unopened cans. One contained mushrooms, the other two peas. "It's always better than nothing at all." Ragtag used to say. BOOMerang left and went back to his pregnant girlfriend. While collecting the goods, it began to show that this had been one of the better nights. All in all, they had gathered some cloth, glow sticks, food cans, a pack of partly charged batteries, two old books and a long expired calendar. The last one was still useful to the Crasht, mainly because it helped to keep track of time (the real date was irrelevant). Scum once had a watch, but it broke some months ago. Because today a new calendar was found, it was declared to be January 1st. Of course, every community of the underground had their own way of counting the days.

"What do you think about the helicopters?", Ragtag asked afterwards. Cala started to tell her opinion, but she was interrupted by Tramb. He was "a rude, old bastard", at least he said it about himself and eventually everyone had agreed at least once. "It differs a lot.", he said. Ragtag shrugged her shoulders and said: "So what? I still want to hear it. What your friends think, too." Cala used this opportunity and began: "I believe, the troops prepare for a hunt." "But that doesn't make any sense. why would they be calling then?" Ded disagreed. Ragtag's face showed no expression except for being thoughtful. "Ded, do you think we're in danger?", she asked after a while. "Well... I think they searched for someone. Just like Scum said earlier. They could come down here to find out if we know anything." Ded responded. He didn't need to add anything else. It was common knowledge that troopers never asked kindly. Brutally was a more accurate word.

Tramb snorted. "Paranoia is a good thing in order to survive, we all know that.", he said. "But I don't see why the troops should bother to come down here. A hunt won't take place when we're alarmed. They are not stupid. Helicopters with lights and loud calls? They know we noticed them. I think, they want to scare us. Make us panic. Maybe it's a new tactic. When we're afraid of the outside, they have some peace and quiet." "So what do you suggest we do?", Ragtag asked. She still showed no emotion at all. If the Crasht knew poker, Ragtag would have been unbeatable. "We do nothing. Just keep on with our daily life." Tramb just said. Cala, Scum and Ded disagreed. Dregs did not say it aloud, but he had a bad feeling about those helicopters. He couldn't bring it up, though. Ragtag relied on common sense and not on a single person's intuition. Not even on her own.

Dregs returned to his and Vice's place afterwards. She wasn't there but instead of her Mäss was sitting on some

old shreds. He looked suspiciously innocent. “Whatever you just picked up, put it back.”, Dregs just said. “I don’t know what you mean.”, Mäss responded. He was a good liar but he just made the mistake to look to a certain area. “So you weren’t trying to ‘find’ yourself some food?” Dregs asked. “Seriously, Mäss. A better name would be Tick for you. Or at least parasite, So others are warned.” Mäss made a face and then handed Dregs a small can. He muttered something before he tried to leave. It was either an insult or an excuse. “What else did you want?” “Nothing.”, Mäss said and left Dregs in confusion. A short time later Vice returned. She was a lot younger than Dregs. Her age was something around sixteen while Dregs somehow lost count of his years since he became 23. You couldn’t be picky around here and he was sure they shared love or something similar enough. She had been away to get some water. It was for safety reasons that Crasht didn’t dwell next to the water source. The troops searched such places first when a hunt was about to take place. “Where’s Mäss?”, she asked Dregs. “No idea. He tried to steal our food.” Vice’s only respond was: “Pitiful bastard.” So that the topic was done. Mäss was the new one and he had problems fitting in. Dregs and Sicko found him some weeks ago. He lost his group due to an encounter with troops and there was no way for him to go back home. It wasn’t uncommon among the underground communities to abandon single survivors. Either it was because of their injuries, mental as well as physical, or because of possible infections. But single survivors were also rare because they died soon. It was common knowledge that no one lasts longer than a day on the surface. The explanations depended on the person you asked. Some said the troops simply killed everyone in sight, others said it had something to do with the sunlight and others claimed the air outside was poisoned.

Dregs and Sicko found Mäss somewhere in the tunnels. If they had been on the outside they would have left him. But Crasht needed members. Even with Mäss they were too few to last long, they all knew that. They were one of the smallest groups in the underground. Only the clan of traders had less members. That is, if they still existed.

Later on, Vice and Dregs lied in the pitch black darkness. Dregs felt Vice’s heartbeat and her warm body next to him. Something had woken him up. He could hear someone’s snore and the slight mourning of two others. But that hadn’t woken him. Dregs held one of his hand up and stared into the darkness. He couldn’t see it. The absence of light was a good sign. Dregs was about to fell asleep again, when he heard a dull metallic sound. Suddenly he was wide awake and alarmed. He quickly dressed himself and left his place. There was the sound again. It wasn’t loud, but in the silent darkness, Dregs’s own heartbeats sounded like thunderclaps to him. He suddenly realised that the mourning had stopped. The sound came nearer and Dregs disliked its direction. It came from the staircase, the way to the surface. If that were troops and didn’t fall for the red herrings, they were all about to die. Dregs woke Vice but with his hand on her mouth. She knew what that meant. They woke the others silently. Tramb, Rascal, Ragtag, BOOMerang, Sleazy and Zombie were already awake. It didn’t take long until the other eight people were woken. They rushed as silently as possible towards a certain escape route. It was located behind the place they used as toilet. It’s easy to imagine the stench there. No one spoke a word. Instead they used a sign language made of tapping and touching to communicate. The slight sound came nearer. It came from the floor above them. Suddenly a loud noise erupted. There was shooting and running.

The staircases were the only way to reach other floors. The access roads were barricaded by debris, but in a way, that fresh air could still reach the lower regions. Therefore Crasht could hear the noises from above.

It was impossible to tell how much time had passed since Dregs woke up. He had lost his sence of time in this pitch black darkness. The noise from above has died down, but still nobody dared to make a sound. Slowly they made their way towards the emergency exit. Dregs was sure he could still hear something, footsteps caused by heavy boots. A hand was pressed against his chest. In return he pressed his hand on the chest of the person behind him, Vice.

A hollow sound filled the air and Dregs knew, all members of Crasht held their breaths. Though it was of no use if this sound reached the upper floors. Ragtag had opened the lid of a shaft. One by one they would now crawl through it and make their way through the laybrinth of the underground. Hopefully they could return within a few hours.

To read more, go to: <http://diluculi.deviantart.com/>

Next Issue:

The history of industrial music and the goth scene, The Last Man on Earth contest results, interviews, video game reviews, a look into the paranormal and disturbing new fiction and art as we prepare for.....

THE APOCALYPSE

Special thanks and credits

Cover by exile hazard, pgs. 2,3,22,26-27,36,40,43, 112, 114,122,130

<http://adrianexile.deviantart.com/>

Pgs. 4 & 6 by <http://parakeetwuv.deviantart.com/>

Pg. 9 & 10,, top photo on 95, 97: <http://onyx-philomel.deviantart.com/>

Pts. 16-21 featuring the model from <http://iztajupiter.deviantart.com/>

Pgs. 30-31 by <http://momothecat.deviantart.com/>

Pg. 32, 47, 53 by <http://githos.deviantart.com/>

Pg. 44, 102-110 by www.madbaumer37.bigcartel.com

Full comic on sale there and art gallery at: www.madbaumer37.deviantart.com

It is based on the Tibetan book of the Dead.

Art by <http://markusvogt.deviantart.com/> on pages 24 & 28, 140

Pgs. 48-49: <http://hectorpineda.deviantart.com/>

Art on pages 75 and 76 by <http://useitasfuel.tumblr.com/>

Art on Page 56, 77 by: <http://psdpisdead.deviantart.com/>

Pages 54-55 by Rae Vena: <http://www.facebook.com/RAEVENAartist>

Her work is also for sale at: <http://www.etsy.com/shop/surrealistVISIONS>

Art on page 78 by: <http://antryg-a-silicon-sky.deviantart.com/>

Pg. 80,119,129, 130: <http://dark-tox1c.deviantart.com/>

Pg. 84: <http://trieffiewiles.deviantart.com/>

Art on pgs. 88,89,144-145 by www.facebook.com/bubbbock

Pages 64, 67 by <http://daestock.deviantart.com/>

How to feed Depression comic, pgs. 68-74 by <http://anxiousa.deviantart.com/>

Pgs. 116-120: <http://ajgiel.deviantart.com/>

Pg. 98, 126, 131 & 139: <http://if-not-for-gravity.deviantart.com/gallery/>

Artist Bio, page 115: I was born in Tel Aviv, Israel in 1988. I have been drawing for ever since I can remember, and yet I am a self-taught artist as I have never studied art professionally. I graduated from the Israel Institute of Technology, where I got my civil engineering degree. I am trying to combine my art and working as an engineer, as it seems I cannot do with just one of these. I have many interests, but unfortunately there are only 24 hours in a day - shame. I have recently started drawing seriously again after a 3 year period in which I almost couldn't get myself to do it, due to the demanding schedule of Academia. Having resumed, I cannot seem to stop and I do not intend to. I will never stop drawing again. I have found a new passion in my life – Surrealism – which is the only thing that makes sense to me.

Author Bio, pg. 99 “Global Illumination”:

“I am Vasileios Pasialiokis—or simply Vas—a Greek student working his way to a computer engineering major. I'm interested in information technology, politics, socio-economic reform, and convoluted stories. I try to combine these interests into literature that's more demanding than average, and doesn't shy away from controversy for the sake of political correctness.”

As always go to our website at www.surrealgrotesque.com

Like us on facebook at: www.facebook.com/TheSurrealGrotesque

Follow us on Twitter @RealGrotesque

And donate five dollars if you enjoyed this issue to paypal at dangrn77@hotmail.com

All submissions should be sent to SurrealGrotesque77@hotmail.com